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At the round earth's imagined corners

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For if above all these my sins abound,
‘Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
When we are there; here on this lowly ground
Teach me how to repent; for that’s as good
As if thou hadst sealed my pardon with thy blood.

Annotations
The description of the angels at the earth’s ‘corners’ comes from the Book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, which contains an account of how the world will end: ‘And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth’
[5] fire: the fire that will accompany the world’s end
[6] dearth: famine; poverty
[6] agues: fevers or illnesses
[6] tyrannies: cruel, oppressive regimes
[7] hath slain: has killed
[8] and never taste death’s woe: those who are free of sin and still alive when God appears on the Day of Judgement. These people will go straight to heaven without dying
[9] a space: for a short time
[10] my sins abound: my sins are even more plentiful
[11] abundance of thy grace: God’s generous blessing or forgiveness
[14] sealed my pardon: guaranteed my forgiveness
Tease It Out

1. A vast number of people have lived and died since the beginning of the world. What phrase indicates this?

2. The ‘flood’ killed many people. To what biblical story is the poet referring?

3. Describe in your own words three other causes of death described by the poet.

4. **Class Discussion:** Where have the souls of these dead people been residing?

5. What phrase suggests that their bodily remains are to be found all over the world?

6. How will angels signal that the end of the world has come?

7. What will the souls of the dead do at this moment?

8. **Class Discussion:** Some people will still be living when the angelic trumpets sound and the end of the world arrives.
   - According to Donne, will these people ever experience death?

9. The poet in the first eight lines is eager for the end of the world to come. What phrases indicate this? Can you suggest why he is so eager?

10. In what line does the poet change his mind about wanting this to happen?

11. The poet considers himself to be a truly terrible sinner. What phrase indicates this?

12. **True of false:** It will be too late when the world ends to seek forgiveness for his sins.

13. What do you understand by the term ‘lowly ground’?

14. What does the poet want to accomplish while he is still on this ‘lowly ground’?

Exam Prep

1. **Personal Response:** Write a few lines describing your understanding of the term ‘repent’. Why must Donne be taught how to do this? Rank the following in order of plausibility:
   - Donne knows little about Christianity and requires special instruction
   - Donne is asking God to grant him resolve and mental fortitude
   - Donne is a special person who requires God to enter his life in a special way

2. **Class Discussion:** ‘Donne presents a very bleak view of religion, one obsessed with sin, death and damnation’. Discuss this statement as a class, referring to the three Holy Sonnets on your course.

3. **Exam Prep:** Write an introduction to the poetry of John Donne aimed at transition year students. You should mention two poems that focus on spirituality and two poems that focus on romantic and sexual love. Don’t forget to mention Donne’s use of metaphor and other literary devices.

Language Lab

1. Donne is well known as a poet of paradox and contradiction.
   - Would you agree that the poem’s opening line contains such a contradiction?
   - What common expression is referred to in this line?
   - Search for images of 17th century maps of the world. Can you suggest how these might have influenced this line?

2. Donne’s poetry is known for its outrageous claims and demands. Read the poem carefully. Identify one such claim and one such demand and state why each might be described as outrageous.

3. The poem’s conclusion features a typically inventive simile. Repentence is compared to a legal document sealed in Christ’s own blood. Come up with three similes of your own that compare an abstract concept (such as victory, sorrow, desire) to a physical object.
The poem’s opening lines refer to the Book of Revelation, chapters 8 to 11. These chapters describe how the end of the world will be signalled by the sound of seven trumpet blasts blown by angels. Donne longs for the end of the world to come. He longs to hear these trumpets ringing out: ‘At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow/ Your trumpets, angels’.

Donne imagines what the end of the world would be like:

- The souls of every single person who has lived and died will ‘arise’ from death.
- This would be an extraordinary number of souls: ‘numberless infinities’
- Each soul would reunite with its body.
- These remains, of course, are ‘scattered’ all over the world, some buried in graveyards, others lost at sea.

Donne lists some of the different ways in which people have died since the world began. He first mentions the victims of ‘the flood’, which is associated with the story of Noah and his Ark: ‘All whom the flood did … o’erthrow’. He then mentions those who will be consumed by flames as the end of the world approaches. The Book of Revelation describes how the end of the world will be preceded by infernos, asteroid strikes and other catastrophic events.

The poet also mentions other more mundane causes of death:

- Those who died because of ‘war’.
- Those who died due to a ‘dearth’ or scarcity of food.
- Those who died naturally of ‘age’.
- Those who died from disease or ‘ague’
- Those who were the victims of ‘tyrannies’, of wicked rulers or regimes.
- Those who took their own lives out of ‘Despair’.
- Those who were put to death in accordance with the ‘law’
- Those who were killed by ‘accident’ or chance.

There are also, of course, those who are still living when the end of the world arrives. These people will have suffered through the various crises and catastrophes that precede the end of the world. They will hear the angels’ trumpets sounded at the earth’s four ‘corners’. Then they will see or ‘behold’ God Himself as He enters His creation. These survivors will have made it to the end of the world without dying, and now they will never ‘taste death’s woe’. They will never endure the terror and uncertainty of death. Their souls will never depart from their bodies and their bodies will never rot in the ground. Instead, they will ascend, body and soul, into heaven.

This, of course, is why Donne is so eager for the end of the world to occur during his lifetime. He wants to be one of the few who never has to die, who avoids ‘death’s woe’ and makes it directly to paradise.

A change of heart

But the poet suddenly has a change of heart, deciding that he is no longer so eager for the world to end. He addresses Christ, asking Him to let the souls of the dead ‘sleep’ a little longer.

The poet believes himself to be a very sinful man. In fact, he fears that he might be the most sinful man to have ever lived: ‘above all these my sins abound’. The poet, therefore, needs to ask for Christ’s ‘grace’, for His favour or forgiveness. Because he is such a terrible sinner, he would require an ‘abundance’ of this ‘grace’, an extraordinary level of forgiveness. It would be too late, he feels, to ask for such forgiveness when the end of the world has come: “Tis late … When we are there”.

This is Poetry John Donne
The poet, therefore, wants the end of the world to be delayed. This will allow him the time he needs to get himself right with God. He wishes to remain on the earth’s ‘lowly ground’ and atone for his sins.

The poet is desperate to ‘repent’. He wants to not only express remorse for the things he has done, but he also wants to renounce sin and lead a better life. But he feels that he is incapable of doing so. He is too prone to sinning, too susceptible to temptation. He needs Christ to come directly into his life and teach him how to be a better human being.

SIN AND REDEMPTION

Throughout his poetry Donne seems to get a perverse pleasure in presenting himself as a terrible person. His sins, he seems to suggest, are far greater than those of ordinary people. In this poem, he even implies that he’s more sinful than anyone else who has ever lived or died. His sins would, therefore, require an ‘abundance’ of forgiveness on God’s part.

The poem also highlights Donne’s eagerness for repentance and redemption. He is desperate to atone for his sins and make himself right with God. Donne, however, feels that his redemption can only be achieved with special treatment. He cannot, like other Christians, be guided to redemption by prayer and the sacraments. Instead, he needs Christ to enter his life directly in some special manner so he can be taught how to repent.

The fear of hell and damnation is another recurring feature of Donne’s poetry. To Donne, we remind ourselves, the prospect of hell was something very real and something to be greatly feared. We see this when he asks for the end of the world because the end of the world brings with it the final judgement, when God assesses the souls of all who have lived. The poet fears that, due to his sinful nature, he will fail this judgement, and will be cast into damnation rather than ascending directly into heaven.

DEATH

This sonnet is a powerful meditation on mortality. The first eight lines (the octet) forcibly remind us that death lies in store for each of us. Every one of the ‘numberless infinities’ of people who have lived throughout then ages are now dead. They may have met their ends through a myriad of different ways but they all have the grave in common.

The poem, too, highlights Donne’s own terror of dying. Indeed, he calls on God to end reality itself so he won’t have to face dying. He would prefer to still be alive when the world ends so he can be transported directly to heaven without ever having to die. Indeed, it is only concern about his soul’s sinful state that causes him to think better of the world ending immediately.

DONNE’S METAPHYSICAL STYLE

Outrageous Claims and Demands

Like the other Metaphysical poets of his day Donne enjoyed making outrageous claims, statements and comparisons. In this instance he demands no less than the end of the world itself. Equally outrageous is his claim that he is the most sinful person who has ever lived or died.

Inventive Metaphors and Similes

The poet, as we have seen, wants Christ to enter his life and teach him how to repent. Receiving Christ into his life is compared to receiving a letter of ‘pardon’. Envelopes containing official documents were sealed with wax to ensure privacy. Donne, however, imagines an envelope that has been sealed, not with wax but Christ’s own ‘blood’. A pardon sealed in blood seems more serious than one sealed with wax.

The mention of blood of course also brings to mind Christ’s crucifixion, where he suffered for the sins of all mankind.

Paradox and Contradiction

There is something paradoxical about the poem’s opening line, which describes how the earth is round but also has corners. The ‘four corners of the earth’ is an everyday phrase, and one that also occurs in the seventh chapter of the Book of Revelation: ‘I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth’.

Form

‘At the round earth’s imagined corners’ is a Petrarchan, or Italian sonnet. In the octet, or the first eight lines, the poet calls on God to end the world immediately. While in the sestet, or the last six lines, he calls on God to delay. The poem’s ‘volta’ or turn occurs with the word ‘But’ in line 9, where the poet changes his mind about wanting the world to end.

Tone

The poem opens with a commanding tone, with the poet adopting an almost God-like role, calling on the world to end and issuing instructions to the angels and the souls of the dead. The poem’s closing lines, however, are much more humble in tone, with Donne presenting himself as a human being upon the earth’s ‘lowly ground’, someone deeply flawed and desperately in need of God’s mercy and grace.

Science and Superstition

John Donne lived through an exciting period of scientific discovery and many of his poems exhibit a keen interest in this new learning. He uses the term ‘imagined’ to describe these corners because he knew very well that the Earth is round. The ‘corners’ that he has in mind are the corners of a map of the world (English maps from the Renaissance often featured illustrations of angels blowing trumpets in the four directions: North, South, East and West.) Donne, therefore, calls on the angels to take up position at four equivalent points around the world.
The Exact Moment
I Became a Poet

for Kay Foran

was in 1963 when Miss Shannon
rapping the duster on the easel’s peg
half obscured by a cloud of chalk

said *Attend to your books girls,*
*or mark my words, you’ll end up*
in the sewing factory.

It wasn’t just that some of the girls’
mothers worked in the sewing factory
or even that my own aunt did,

and many neighbours, but
that those words ‘end up’ robbed
the labour of its dignity.

Not that I knew it then,
not in those words – labour, dignity.
That’s all back construction.

making sense; allowing also
the teacher was right
and no one knows it like I do myself.

But: I saw them; mothers, aunts and neighbours
trussed like chickens
on a conveyor belt,

getting sewn up the way my granny
sewed the sage and onion stuffing
in the birds.

Words could pluck you,
leave you naked,
your lovely shiny feathers all gone.

Annotations
[2] *easel:* used for holding the blackboard in place
[20] *trussed:* having your legs and arms tied together
Tease It Out

1. How did Miss Shannon attempt to get the attention of the girls in her class?
2. Why for a moment or two was Miss Shannon difficult to see?
3. What advice did Miss Shannon give the girls?
4. What would happen to the girls, according to Miss Shannon, if they failed to follow this advice?
5. Why might Miss Shannon’s words have made some of the girls feel awkward or embarrassed?
6. Did the poet herself experience such feelings? Give a reason for your answer.
7. **Class Discussion:** What does the word ‘dignity’ mean? What does it mean for labour to possess dignity? Would you agree that all jobs, when done well, possess dignity of a sort?
8. **True or false:** The young poet felt that work in the sewing factory possessed no such dignity.
9. Use the phrase ‘end up’ in three separate sentences. Does it suggest a good or a bad outcome?
10. Can you suggest why this phrase, as the young poet saw it, made work in the sewing factory seem undignified?
11. ‘the teacher was right/ and no one knows it like I do myself’. In what sense, according to the poet, was Miss Shannon ‘right’ in her assessment of the sewing factory? Suggest how the poet came to this conclusion.
12. But: I saw them. The poet’s imagination runs away with her and she is struck by an intensely vivid daydream:
   - Who does the poet see and where are these individuals?
   - The poet describes how these individuals have been ‘trussed up’. What do you visualise here?
   - Describe in your own words what is happening to these poor ‘trussed up’ individuals.

Exam Prep

1. **Personal Response:** Pick an occasion from your time in primary school that stands out in your memory. Write a poem or short prose piece in which you describe that ‘exact moment’ in as much detail as possible.
2. **Theme Talk:** Meehan is well known for her depictions of childhood:
   - What do you understand by the term ‘back construction’ as Meehan uses it in this poem?
   - Compare this poem to ‘Buying Winkles’ and ‘Hearth Lessons’. Which poem in your opinion most vividly captures the mentality of childhood?
3. **Class Discussion:** Consider the poem’s title. What was so special about this moment in the classroom? In what sense did the young poet’s understanding of language change on that day in 1963? In what sense did she become a poet at that very moment?
4. **Exam Prep:** ‘Meehan is nothing if not outspoken when it comes to issues of poverty and social justice’. Write an essay responding to this statement in which you reference this poem and two others on the course.

Language Lab

1. The young poet realised for the first time that words are extremely powerful and can cause great psychological harm. What metaphor is used to describe this harm? Is it an effective one in your opinion?
2. Meehan is known for her playful, witty approach to the poetry. Is this playfulness in evidence in her depiction of the ‘trussed up’ mothers, aunts and neighbours? Or is this an image of pure horror? Give a reason for your answer.
The Exact Moment I Became a Poet

This poem is set in 1963 when Meehan was 8-year-old pupil in Central Model Girls' School, Gardiner Street. The poet remembers an occasion when she and the rest of her classmates had become distracted from their lessons and were chatting and laughing. She recalls how Miss Shannon, her teacher at the time, attempted to silence the classroom.

Miss Shannon, in an effort to gain the class’s attention, rapped her duster against the easel that was holding up her blackboard. A ‘cloud’ of chalk dust flew upward from the duster, leaving her ‘half obscured’ for a moment. She urged her pupils to be quiet, issuing them a stark warning. If they didn’t ‘Attend’ or pay attention at school they would never find a good job later in life. They will only be able to secure employment in the local ‘sewing factory’: ‘or mark my words you’ll end up/ in the sewing factory’

The young poet felt that the ‘labour’ in the sewing factory had its own particular ‘dignity’. She must have realised that this work, while not fancy or highly-paid, was important in its own way. She must have realised, too, that the women of the factory took great pride in what they did, in producing garments that were well made and hard-wearing. Miss Shannon’s words, she realised, ‘robbed’ the women of this ‘dignity’, making their ‘labour’ seem utterly menial and pointless.

The poet acknowledges that she’s engaging in ‘back construction’, that she’s altering or reconstructing a memory. We see this when she depicts her eight-year-old self using terms like ‘dignity’ and ‘labour’. The poet accepts that she didn’t actually know these terms when she was eight years old. However, she did have some grasp of the feelings and concepts to which these terms relate: ‘Not that I knew it then, / not in those words’.

A vision formed by words
Miss Shannon’s words triggered the young poet’s imagination, leading to a strange and disturbing flight of fancy:

• She found herself imagining the sewing factory with its crew of ‘mothers, aunts and neighbours’.
• She imagined that these women had been ‘trussed’, which suggests that their legs and arms were tied together, and placed on a ‘conveyor belt’.
• She imagined that the women were being ‘sewn up’ like chickens being readied for the oven: ‘the way my granny/ sewed the sage and onion stuffing/ in the birds’.

We imagine a procession of women, tied-up and helpless, being shunted along the conveyor belt until one by one they come to some monstrous sewing machine that mutilates their bodies.
FOCUS ON STYLE

Metaphor, Simile and Figures of Speech
The poem concludes with a most memorable metaphor:
- Human beings are compared to chickens.
- Our self-esteem is compared to the ‘lovely shiny feathers’ that cover a chicken’s body.
- Hurtful words are compared to hands that pluck the chicken’s figures.

Plucking hands will leave a chicken ‘naked’, utterly stripped of its feathers. Hurtful words, similarly, can leave a human being emotionally naked, stripped of our dignity and self-esteem.

Meehan, then, captures the power of hurtful words, such as those spoken by Miss Shannon in that long-ago classroom, to leave us diminished, belittled and humiliated.

Verbal Music
‘The Exact Moment I Became a Poet’, like many of Meehan’s poems, is rich in imagery. The poet wonderfully captures an everyday classroom scene (the teacher banging her duster amid a loud of chalk dust) as well as the surreal and nightmarish image of the ‘trussed’ women on the conveyor belt.

BECOMING A POET
Meehan, in this poem, describes a crucial moment in her childhood, one when she first realised the power of words. She suddenly understood that words could have a powerful effect on the imagination. Her teacher’s comments triggered a flight of fancy image that was not only distressing but also exceptionally vivid: ‘I saw them’. For a moment, in her mind’s eye, she could see the ‘trussed’ women on the conveyor belt with a strange and disturbing clarity.

She suddenly understood, too, that words could powerfully affect the emotions. Miss Shannon’s remarks about the factory, she realised, had the power to hurt not only the factory workers themselves, but also hurt the workers’ daughters nieces and neighbours who sat beside her in the classroom, so that they felt weak, vulnerable and exposed: ‘words could pluck you, leave you naked’.

The eight-year-old Meehan, then, at that precise moment ‘became a poet’. She didn’t, of course, immediately start writing poems and getting them published. But she knew that she would spend her life devoted to language. She would begin to learn, starting right now, how to make language work for her. She would harness the power of words to shape images in people’s minds. She would use language, just like Miss Shannon had done in the classroom, to affect the emotions of those who heard and read her.

Miss Shannon, on this occasion, used language in a negative fashion. Her words, as we’ve seen, were wounding and diminishing. The eight-year-old Meehan, we sense, is determined to use language in a much more positive fashion. She will interrogate the powerful in society while providing a voice for the voiceless, weak and vulnerable.

SOCIAL JUSTICE
We sense that the poet, even as a primary school student, was keenly aware of social inequality. She realised that people in her part of inner city Dublin were denied the opportunities granted to those from more privileged parts of the city. And this lack of opportunity, of course, was passed down from one generation to the next.

The poet’s daydream vividly conveys this social inequality. Society is compared to a nightmarish factory where generation after generation of ‘mothers, aunts and neighbours’ from inner city Dublin are processed. The image of these women being ‘trussed up’ suggests how they were constrained by lack of opportunity. The image of them being mutilated by a giant sewing machine suggests how their underprivileged lives left them mentally and physically damaged.

CHILDHOOD
‘The Exact Moment I Became a Poet’ wonderfully captures the mentality of childhood. The poem Meehan reminds us that eight-year-old children can understand ideas such as ‘labour’ and ‘dignity’, even if they lack the words to express such concepts. It also reminds us that children tend to have exceptionally vivid imaginations that sometimes lead them to strange and disturbing flights of fancy.

STRENGTH AND POWER OF WOMEN
The poem also touches on the strength and power of women, another of Meehan’s recurring themes. She reminds us that in the inner city Dublin of the 50s and 60s it was working women like these – often doing difficult, repetitive work – who were the primary breadwinners in their respective households, bringing home a wage that kept utter poverty and despair at bay.

The poet, looking back, realises that Miss Shannon, in one way, was correct in her assessment of the sewing factory: ‘allowing also/ the teacher was right’. Meehan’s own experiences of life have taught her that such factories are exhausting and dehumanising places in which to make a living: ‘and no one knows it like I do myself’. Meehan herself, then, wouldn’t want to spend her life working in such a place of employment. But Meehan, even as she accepts the truth of Miss Shannon’s comments, insists that the ‘mothers, aunts and neighbours’ who worked there retained a certain ‘dignity’. She insists that their labour, while far from glamorous, had value and meaning.

THEMES
Grandfather

They brought him in on a stretcher from the world,
Wounded but humorous; and he soon recovered.
Boiler-rooms, row upon row of gantries rolled
Away to reveal the landscape of a childhood
Only he can recapture. Even on cold
Mornings he is up at six with a block of wood
Or a box of nails, discreetly up to no good
Or banging round the house like a four-year-old —

Never there when you call. But after dark
You hear his great boots thumping in the hall
And in he comes, as cute as they come. Each night
His shrewd eyes bolt the door and set the clock
Against the future, then his light goes out.
Nothing escapes him; he escapes us all.

Annotations

[3] **Boiler-rooms**: refers to the boiler rooms of various ships that were built in Belfast’s famous shipyards. Mahon’s grandfather worked as a boilermaker and was employed in the ship-building industry

[3] **gantries**: large bridge-like cranes used in shipbuilding; a travelling crane, used in the building of ships


[12] **shrewd**: astute, sharp-witted
Tease It Out

1. Based on your reading of the poem, how old do you think the poet was when his grandfather came to live with him?
2. The grandfather was injured when he arrived at the poet’s house? Based on your reading of the poem, can you suggest how this injury might have occurred?
3. Did it take the grandfather a long time to recover from this injury? What might this suggest about his personality?
4. In what industry had the poet’s grandfather worked in all his life?
5. What does the phrase ‘rolled away’ suggest about the grandfather’s memory of his working years? Rank the following in order of plausibility:
   • Those years no longer seemed important to him.
   • He was eager to think and talk about his career.
   • The grandfather’s memory was failing.
6. What type of projects did the grandfather undertake while he was living with the young poet?
7. Class Discussion: Consider the phrase ‘getting up to no good’. What does this suggest about the young poet’s attitude towards these projects?
8. What phrase indicates that the grandfather made a lot of noise early in the morning?
9. What phrase indicates he was usually absent from the house most of the day?
10. When the grandfather came home in the evening was he eager to talk to the other members of the family? Give a reason for your answer.
11. The grandfather is described as ‘bolting the door... against the future’. What does this suggest about the grandfather’s attitude to the future? Rank the following in order of plausibility:
   • He is terrified of death.
   • He doesn’t like the direction in which society seems to be headed.
   • He would rather relive memories of the past than think about the future.
12. True or false: The poet regards his grandfather as a highly observant person.

Exam Prep

1. Personal Response: Imagine you are the poet’s grandfather. Write a diary entry describing an average day. Your entry should begin early in the morning and conclude late in the evening.
2. Class Discussion: ‘This poem depicts an elderly man enjoying a second childhood’. Discuss this as a class, saying whether you agree or disagree with the statement.
3. Theme Talk: Mahon’s poetry is deeply concerned with the theme of community and solitude. List the different ways in which the grandfather is part of the family’s community. List the different ways in which he remains a solitary figure, one who keeps that community at a distance.
4. Exam Prep: ‘Derek Mahon explores people and places in his own distinctive style’. Write a short essay in response to this statement, making reference to ‘Grandfather’ and at least two other poems on your course.

Language Lab

1. Poet of Precision: As a class, consider the poem’s opening line. What does it suggest about the relationship between the grandfather and the outside world? How had the grandfather’s social role and responsibilities changed with his retirement?
2. Group Discussion: The poem provides several hints about the poet’s grandfather. Working in small groups, list as many as you can. Then come up with three adjectives that in your opinion best capture his demeanour and approach to life.
In this poem, Mahon remembers his paternal grandfather. The grandfather, like generations of Mahon’s relatives, spent his life working in Belfast’s thriving shipbuilding industry. He was a boilermaker by trade and spent countless hours in the boilerrooms of various ships that were under construction, installing the machinery that enabled these huge ships to make their way across the oceans.

The grandfather continued working until he was quite old. Finally, however, he fell foul of a workplace accident. Mahon is vague on the precise details of this incident. However, it seems that the grandfather was ‘Wounded’ by some tool or piece of equipment in the shipyard.

The grandfather’s injuries were severe enough to end his career in the shipyard. It also meant that he was no longer able to live alone. Since his wife had passed away some years before, he went to live with the young poet and his family in their house.

Mahon, we remember, was an only child. He describes himself as having been a quiet, thoughtful boy: ‘a strange child with a taste for verse’. We can imagine, therefore, how fascinated he must have been by this new addition to the household. He vividly remembers his grandfather arriving in an ambulance and being stretchered into the house: ‘They brought him in on a stretcher from the world’.

**The grandfather’s daily life**
Thankfully, the grandfather ‘soon recovered’ and was up and about again. The poet provides a memorable portrayal of the grandfather’s daily life in his new home:

- The grandfather was an early riser: ‘Even on cold/Mornings he is up at six’. We get the impression that he would be the first to get up each morning and would busy himself around the house while the others were still in bed.
- The grandfather, it seems, would be absent from the house for most of the day. He was ‘Never there when
you call’. We get the impression that the young poet and his parents didn’t really know what the grandfather was doing during these lengthy absences.

• Only ‘after dark’ would the grandfather return to the house. We get the impression that he rarely greeted the other members of the household on his return. They would hear him taking off his ‘great boots’ in the hallway and then heading up to his room and shutting his door.

The grandfather also engaged in carpentry or DIY, working with ‘a block of wood’ and a ‘box of nails’. We can imagine him erecting shelves, perhaps, or making cupboards. According to the poet, he did so ‘discretely’ or secretively. This suggests that he worked when there was no one else around and didn’t discuss what he was building with the other members of the household. The poet amusingly describes how the grandfather was ‘up to no good’ when he undertook such projects. We can imagine the young poet’s parents complaining about dust and noise and half-finished contraptions that were left lying around the place.

A sketch of the grandfather
The grandfather, even in old age, remained physically strong and powerful. We see this in how he recovered quickly from his injuries. The phrase ‘great boots’, too, suggests his imposing stature. The terms ‘thumping’ and ‘banging’, meanwhile, reinforce our sense of his imposing physical presence. There was nothing dainty, then, about the grandfather. He was a big, burly boilermaker, who made his presence felt wherever he went.

The grandfather also comes across as someone who was resilient and uncomplaining. This was someone who didn’t mind getting up early in the morning, no matter how cold it was! The phrase ‘Wounded but humorous’ suggests that he didn’t complain about the injuries caused by his accident. Instead, he made light of the accident and the considerable suffering it must have caused him.

The poet also emphasises the grandfather’s mental sharpness, even in old age. The grandfather, according to the poet, was ‘as cute as they come’, was as quick-witted and intelligent as anyone could hope to be. The phrase ‘Nothing escapes him’ emphasises that the grandfather was a highly observant person, one whose ‘shrewd eyes’ had the ability to assess and evaluate all he saw.

The grandfather’s second childhood
The grandfather’s life changed the moment he was stretchered into the young poet’s house. He was no longer burdened with the responsibilities of work, of managing his finances or of running his own household. In an important sense, he was no longer part of the world of work and adult responsibility. As a young man, he had ventured out into this world, gaining employment in the shipyards. Now, as an old man, he was leaving it again: ‘They brought him in on a stretcher from the world’.

For years, the grandfather had been too pre-occupied with work to think much about the past. Now, in retirement, he has the time to dwell on his long-ago childhood. He has the space to ‘recapture’ aspects of his own personal history, incidents and details that no one else living can recall: ‘a childhood/ Only he can recapture’.

There is a sense of the grandfather enjoying something of a ‘second childhood’ while residing in the young poet’s house. As we noted above, the grandfather no longer has any real responsibilities. He is free to come and go as he pleases, and to tinker about with various projects and activities that may or may not be finished.

There is something childlike, too, about how the grandfather went ‘banging round the house’ We get the impression that he made quite a bit of noise as he moved from room to room and wasn’t terribly bothered about who he disturbed. There were moments, it seems, when the poet’s exasperated parents felt like they had taken in a ‘four-year-old’ child rather than an elderly man.

The grandfather and the future
The grandfather, it seems, has an old-fashioned, mechanical clock in his room. Such clocks had to be wound each evening to ensure they kept accurate time. They would be synchronised or ‘set against’ the radio, often against the chimes of Big Ben which were broadcast at 10pm each evening.

Mahon, however, declares that his grandfather sets his clock not against the radio but ‘Against the future’. This is an example of the poetical device known as ‘metonymy’, which occurs when a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept. Mahon, in this instance, refers to the radio as the ‘future’. It is as if the wireless radio, this new-fangled device, represents a future that will be increasingly defined by technology, connectivity and communication.

The grandfather, according to the poet, took a dim view of this technological future. He was someone from an earlier age, who didn’t appreciate or even understand the modern world that was dawning in the Belfast of the 1950s and 1960s. The grandfather, we sense, attempted to avoid thinking about these societal changes as much as possible. Metonymy is once again used to illustrate this mindset. We are told that the grandfather would ‘bolt the door’ not against any physical intruders, but against the future itself. To the grandfather, then, the future is something invasive and intrusive, something to be repelled as much as possible.
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The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree, 
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made; 
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee, 
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow, 
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings; 
There midnight’s all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow, 
And evening full of the linnet’s wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day 
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore; 
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey, 
I hear it in the deep heart’s core.

Annotations

Innisfree: a tiny uninhabited island on Lough Gill, Co. Sligo

[2] Clay and wattles: an ancient construction technique known as ‘wattle and daub’, whereby clay is smeared over a frame of interwoven branches

[7] a purple glow: Innisfree comes from the Irish Inis Fraoich, which means ‘island of heather’. Here Yeats imagines the purple heather glowing in the noon sunlight

[8] linnet’s wings: a linnet is a type of finch, typically brown and red-breasted
Tease It Out

1. The poet declares his intention to go and live on Innisfree. Is this a spontaneous decision or something he’s been thinking about for a long time? Give a reason for your answer.
2. What ancient building process will the poet use to construct his cabin on Innisfree? Describe it in your own words.
3. The poet imagines living a self-sufficient life on the island. What different foodstuffs does he imagine growing in order to feed himself?
4. What metaphor does the poet use to describe the mist that drifts across the island each morning? Is it an effective one in your opinion?
5. What word or phrase describes the effect of starlight as it’s reflected in the waters around the island?
6. What sound fills the island as evening comes?
7. Google the Irish language origins of the name Innisfree? What does this suggest about the purple glow that fills the island each noon?
8. What sound does the poet claim to hear ‘night and day’?
9. Consider his description of this sound. Do you think he finds it a pleasant one? Do you think it bothers him that he ‘always’ hears this sound, seemingly everywhere he goes?
10. Is he really hearing this sound or does he experience it only in his own imagination?
11. What aspect of the mind or self is suggested by the phrase ‘deep heart’s core’?
12. In what sort of environment is the poet at this moment? Is he happy to be where he is?

Exam Prep

1. **Class Discussion:** The poet states three times that he will ‘go’ and live on Innisfree. Do you think the poet is serious about changing his life in this way or is he merely trying to convince himself that he’s actually capable of such a radical move? Do you think the poet is prepared for the challenges of living a solitary, self-sufficient lifestyle?
2. **Theme Talk:** ‘Innisfree is a real place, but it’s also an idea, a state of mind that the speaker can access any time’. Do you agree with this statement? Write a few paragraphs in response.
3. **Exam Prep:** Write a piece about the language in this poem, beginning with one of the following phrases:
   - I find the language in this poem interesting and unusual …
   - I find the language in this poem complicated and challenging …
4. **Exam Prep:** Take a moment to visualise your own perfect getaway. It could be a real place or an imaginary one. Write a poem or a short prose piece in which you describe its most important features.

Language Lab

1. ‘In stanza 2, peace is depicted almost as a physical substance, ‘dropping’ like dew from veils of mist onto the grasses’. Do you agree with this interpretation? Write a few sentences in response.
2. ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ uses repetition to great effect. In particular, the phrase ‘I will arise and go now’ has great power when repeated in the final stanza. Suggest how the meaning and tone of this line changes between stanza 1 and stanza 3.
3. This poem makes extensive use of assonance and alliteration to create a beguiling verbal music, such as in line 3: ‘Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee’. Can you identify another example of assonance and another example of alliteration in the poem?
4. ‘And I shall have some peace there’. Identify three words or phrases that emphasise the island’s extreme tranquillity. Is the impression he creates of the island a realistic one, in your opinion?
Stanza 1
The poem opens with a dramatic declaration of intent. It’s as if the poet has suddenly made a decision. It’s as if he’s suddenly realised that he’s had enough of modern living and that a change of direction is needed. And this new existence, he declares, will begin immediately, for he’s going to stand up any minute now and embark on a new chapter in his life: ‘I will arise and go now’. He even emphasises this intention by repeating it in Stanza 3.

Yeats declares his intention to go off and live on the island of Innisfree, a small uninhabited island on Lough Gill in County Sligo. He imagines he would live a very simple life once he gets there:
- He would live ‘alone’ in a clearing or glade upon the island.
- He would build his own cabin: ‘And a small cabin build there’. This would be a very basic type of accommodation. It would be ‘small’. It would be manufactured using the ancient ‘wattle and daub’ technique, which involves smearing mud over interwoven sticks and twigs.
- He would even produce his own food, keeping bees for their honey and growing rows of beans: ‘Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee’.

Yeats, then, seems to imagine living ‘off the grid’, going without the amenities and conveniences of his time. He imagines a life without telephones and telegraphs, with no newspapers or postal service, without the primitive gas and electrical services that were available in 1890s Dublin and London.

Stanza 2
The poet imagines the great beauty of Innisfree, taking us through a day on the island from dawn to dusk to midnight:
- The poet would wake each day to the pleasant chirping sounds of crickets: ‘where the cricket sings’.
- He uses a wonderful metaphor to describe the banks of mist that drift across the island each morning, comparing them to ‘veils’ that drift and disperse, momentarily obscuring the island’s beauty as they pass: ‘the veils of the morning’.
- Noon, too, is beautiful. Sunlight glitters on the heather that covers much of the island and gives it its name. (‘Inis Fraoich’, in Irish, means island of the heather). This glittering heather lends the whole place a ‘purple glow’.
- Evenings on Innisfree are ‘full’ of the sound made by linnets (small brown finches common in the west of Ireland) as they flit around the island: ‘And evening full of the linnet’s wings’.
- Midnight, meanwhile, sees the starlight reflected on Lough Gill, so that its waters glitter and gleam: ‘There midnight’s all a glimmer’.

Stanza 3
The poet claims that the sound of Innisfree’s beaches, of ‘lake water lapping’ on the island’s shores, is always in his mind’s ear. Like a catchy song he can’t get out of his head, these ‘low sounds’ of water are ‘always’ present at the back of his mind. They repeat over and over again, ‘night and day’; we sense that the poet couldn’t make them stop even if he wanted to. These lines, then, emphasise the intensity of the poet’s
attachment to the little island. The lapping sound of its water echoes in the very ‘core’ of his heart, in the depths of his being or psyche. No matter where he goes, the sound of its waters is ever-present at the very centre of his mind, forming a kind of background music as he lives his life. But the thought of Innisfree, it seems, is especially important to the poet when he finds himself in an urban environment: ‘While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey’. We can imagine how the cold grey concrete makes him long for the island’s beauty. We can imagine how the city’s endless racket makes him long for that soothing, almost silent retreat.

Yeats, it’s worth noting, was inspired to write the poem when he was living in London and was feeling homesick for his beloved Sligo. He was walking down Fleet Street, one of that city’s busiest thoroughfares, when he saw a fountain in a shop window, which ‘balanced a little ball upon its jet’. The trickling sound of the fountain reminded him of Innisfree’s lapping waters and sparked the beginning of the poem.

**FOCUS ON STYLE**

**Verbal Music**

The poem contains many examples of assonance and alliteration. Assonance features in the second line, with its broad vowel sounds: ‘a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made’. It is also evident in line 7, where the repeated ‘i’ and ‘o’ sounds create a soft musical effect: ‘midnight’s all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow’. The repeated ‘a’ and ‘o’ sounds in line 10 have a similar musical quality: ‘I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore’. Combined with the alliteration of the ‘l’ sounds, these techniques make this line very pleasant to the ear.

**Imagery**

‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ is a poem of contrasting imagery. There is a stark difference between the imagery of the city and the imagery of Innisfree. The city is a drab and dull place, composed of roadways and ‘pavements grey’. The island, in contrast, is alive with colour and sound. We can contrast the ‘purple glow’ of the heather with the ‘pavements grey’. However, the city seems a very real place, while the island comes across as more of an imagined paradise.

**Tone, Mood and Atmosphere**

In his descriptions of Innisfree, Yeats creates a very peaceful, almost drowsy atmosphere. His days will be marked by the humming of bees and crickets. It is a place where ‘peace comes dropping slow’, where he can relax and be alone in nature. However, we also suspect that this is a highly idealised version of Innisfree. Were Yeats to actually go and try to live on the island by himself, the reality might be very different.

**A CLOSER READING**

**Nature's Beauty**

This is one of Yeats’ best-loved nature poems. Innisfree is depicted as a place of sublime tranquillity. It’s a place of great silence, devoid of any man-made sound. Innisfree, then, is where the poet will discover the peace he so craves: ‘And I shall have some peace there’. Yeats, in a wonderful turn of phrase, presents peace as a physical substance, ‘dropping’ in the form of dew to cover the entire island. Peace, we’re told, ‘comes dropping slow’ from the banks of mist that cover the island each morning, drenching the grasses where the crickets are busy about their song.

**Getting back to Nature**

There are moments when each of us feels like escaping the ‘rat race’ that all-too-often constitutes modern living. We may feel, as Yeats suggests in Stanza 3, like trading in the cacophony of city living, with its endless traffic noise and car alarms, for a place of tranquillity where ‘peace comes dropping slow’. We may feel, as Yeats does in this poem, that it’s time to turn our backs on the stresses and strains of modern living, of exams and deadlines, and of career pressure and social obligations.

We may even fantasise about going off the grid completely, about living without media and devices, even without electricity. Some people even fantasise, as Yeats does here, about being completely self-sufficient, about growing their own food and building their own simple dwelling places.

Innisfree, as the poet describes it, is a place of fantasy, an idealised almost heavenly version of the actual island in County Sligo. It’s a place where the poet can live out his dream of escape from modern life. But fantasy is the operative word. For we sense that Yeats, like most people, wouldn’t last more than a week living alone and self-sufficiently upon Lough Gill. Think of the harsh winters, the difficulty of growing crops, the isolation, and the lack of warmth and electricity.

We sense, then, that the poet won’t really follow through on this decision to ‘arise and go’. We sense that this departure for Innisfree won’t happen now and probably never will, and we also sense that that the poet isn’t quite prepared to leave the modern world behind and embrace what today we’d describe today as a hippy or New Age lifestyle. However, such fantasies can be important. For the poet, this dream of the simple life serves as a comfort or escape when times get tough. When the rat race proves too draining, when he tires of the grey city pavements, he can always daydream about his bean rows on the island of Innisfree.
kitchenette building

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray. “Dream” makes a giddy sound, not strong
Like “rent,” “feeding a wife,” “satisfying a man.”

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
And yesterday’s garbage ripening in the hall,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms

Even if we were willing to let it in,
Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
Anticipate a message, let it begin?

We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!
Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.

Annotations

Kitchenette: a small apartment of a kind often found in African American communities in Chicago, where Brooks lived when she was young; kitchenettes were built by dividing up existing apartments so that more people could be crammed into a housing complex.

[1] involuntary: done unconsciously or against one’s will
[2] giddy: excited and a little out of control
[6] ripening: starting to smell strongly and unpleasantly
[7] aria: a song sung by one person in an opera
Tease It Out

1. The opening line speaks of the ‘dry hours’ experienced by the people living in their tiny kitchenette apartments. In your opinion, does this expression mean:
   • That having a roof over their heads keeps these people from getting wet?
   • That living in poverty and cramped conditions is boring?
   • That many of these people are trying to quit drinking and to remain ‘dry’ in that sense?
   • That people in the apartments are dry and not very friendly in their manner?

2. **Class Discussion:** The people in the small apartments are living according to an ‘involuntary plan’. How much control do they have over their lives? Why?

3. What might the poet mean when she says that she and her fellow tenants are ‘Grayed in, and gray’?

4. What might Brooks mean when she tells us that, in these impoverished and restricted conditions, the word ‘Dream’ sounds weaker than the other words and phrases mentioned in lines 2 to 3?

5. In what sense are dreams ‘giddy’ rather than ‘strong’ and real to the people in the poem?

6. Why would dreams not be as much a part of the kitchenette dwellers’ lives as the other things mentioned?

7. In the second stanza, we get the sense that to reach these impoverished people, a dream would have to fight very hard. What would it be fighting against?

8. When you read the second stanza, what sense do you get of the atmosphere in the housing complex?

9. Why do the kitchenette dwellers not have time to let the giddy dreams into their lives?

10. What might be meant by the image of keeping dreams clean and warm?

11. What kind of ‘message’ might the people in the poem ‘anticipate’ if they had the time, room and leisure to do so? Would this message be a hopeful or depressing one?

12. As the fourth stanza begins, we are told that the poet and her neighbours don’t really get to address these questions about dreams ‘very well’ or for very long. What prevents them from thinking very well or deeply about their dreams? What interrupts them and puts an end to any thoughts about dreams?

13. The people in Number 5 have just come out of the bathroom. Why do you think this is so important to the speaker?

14. How does the small ‘hope’ mentioned in the closing line contrast with the dreams that these impoverished people can’t afford to think about?

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Exam Prep

1. **Class Discussion:** What does this poem tell us about how hardship in life can affect our dreams? How important is it to keep your dreams alive? Why?

2. **Exam Prep:** Make a video set in the kind of housing complex that provides the setting for this poem. The video could be either a documentary or a fictional piece.
   • What would the houses, rooms and streets in the video look like?
   • What music might you use, and what other sounds would we expect to hear?
   • How would the people in the film look and behave?
   • What kind of things would they have to tell us about their lives?

3. **Theme Talk:** Many of the people forced to live in the cramped and uncomfortable apartments that feature in this poem are African Americans. To what extent do you think that racial tensions and injustice may have contributed to their impoverished and difficult lives?

4. ‘kitchenette building’ is written in free verse, which means that, instead of being held to very strict rhyming patterns and metre, it has a fairly open and flexible structure. How well do you think that this kind of flexible structure suits the themes of ‘kitchenette building’?

5. What elements of rhyme can you find in the poem?

6. Pick out some of the striking images that give us a sense of the drab, boring and limited lives that the tenants are living. In each case, explain why you have chosen that image and what it conjures up in your mind.

7. In this poem, Brooks skilfully uses the literary technique known as juxtaposition, in which two quite different things or images are placed alongside each other. Pick out some strong examples of this and explain why you find each of them effective.

8. Another literary technique that Brooks deftly uses in ‘kitchenette building’ is personification, the depiction of a non-human thing or process as if it were a human being. Write a short paragraph on the personification of ‘Dream’ in the poem.
In the 1930s, Chicago became a racially segregated city. The white men who ran the city - its administrators, businessmen and landowners - conspired to ensure that Black people could only rent housing in a certain area. This was the so-called ‘Black belt’, an area that stretched across the city’s south side. Such discrimination and segregation was illegal, but the city’s leaders were so powerful that no one could stop their unofficial policy of keeping the races carefully separated.

The quality of housing in the ‘Black belt’ was extremely poor. Houses would be divided into tiny living spaces and rented out to numerous Black families. The families would also have to share bathroom facilities and a single small kitchen area. These houses, which in Ireland would have been called ‘tenements’, became known in Chicago as ‘kitchenette buildings’.

Brooks, whose parents had moved to Chicago before segregation became a reality, was raised in a comfortable home with a porch and a backyard. But after her marriage, when she was 22 years old, she and her husband were forced to move into a kitchenette building. In her autobiography, Brooks recalls her reaction at having to make do with such cramped and miserable quarters: ‘I remember feeling bleak when I was taken to my honeymoon home, the kitchenette apartment in the Tyson on 43rd and South Park’.

Significantly, Brooks uses the pronoun ‘we’ rather than ‘I’ throughout the poem. It’s a word choice that brilliantly reflects how she and the other residents were stripped of their individuality. It suggests how the residents, lacking all privacy, no longer felt like individual human beings, how they began to experience themselves blurring into a single mass of humanity. It also suggests how the residents were denied the ability to express themselves, to determine the course of their own lives.

They residents, tellingly, are referred to as ‘things’. This suggests how they have been stripped of their personhood, how they are merely objects to be manipulated by a cold and uncaring system. Their lives, Brooks stresses, are determined by an ‘involuntary plan’, a plan they didn’t choose to be a part of and over which they have no control.

Brooks describes how she and her fellow residents were ‘things of dry hours’. She may be using the term ‘dry’ to mean boring, suggesting the dull, repetitive quality of the residents’ lives. But she may also be referring to the water stoppages fact that all too often affected kitchenette buildings. The buildings’ plumbing, not designed for use by so many families, frequently came under strain or stopped working altogether.

Dreams

Brooks focuses on the ‘dreams’ of the residents, on their hopes, ambitions and aspirations. There are residents, no doubt, who dream of buying their own homes. Maybe other residents dream of becoming teachers, architects or successful business executives. Perhaps other residents, like Brooks herself, dream of becoming writers or artists.
Such dreams, however, are contrasted with the grim practicalities of life in the kitchenette building:
- The male residents are preoccupied with ‘feeding a wife’. They are concerned with earning enough to put food on the table for their families.
- The female residents, meanwhile, are concerned with ‘satisfying a man’. This suggests that they want to make sure that their male partners are happy and don’t think about abandoning them and their children.
- Both male and female residents, of course, are worried about having enough money to pay the rent.

These grim practicalities seem real, pressing and important. Dreams, on the other hand, seem vague, unimportant and unrealistic.

Brooks emphasizes this point by referring to the sound of the words themselves. To the residents, words and phrases like ‘rent’ and ‘satisfying a man’ sound ‘strong’. This suggests the relevance and importance of these concepts to residents of the kitchenette building. The word ‘dreams’, on the other hand, seems to have a ‘giddy’ sound. This suggests that to the residents ‘dreams’ seem frivolous, silly and unimportant.

**Time enough to dream?**

There are moments when the residents ‘wonder’ what it would be like to have and nurture such aspirations. But the residents, according to the poet, are unable to wonder ‘well’ about such matters. We get the sense that they are so worn down that they are incapable of imagining a better life.

And their wondering lasts ‘not for a minute’. They can only manage a few seconds of wondering before they are interrupted by the hectic, stressful life of the kitchenette. Their thoughts might, for instance, be intruded on by the sound of bath water draining in the building’s only bathroom. They might realize that the occupant of unit number five has finished his bath: ‘Number Five is out of the bathroom now’. If they themselves want to have a bath, they must rush to the bathroom before somebody else does. In such a frazzled, fraught environment – where even taking a bath is a challenge that requires quick thinking – there simply isn’t time to dwell on dreams, aspirations and remote possibilities.

The poet wonders if these creatures would survive and thrive in the environment of the kitchenette building. ‘Even if’ the residents were willing to let them in.

These creatures may emit wonderful aromas, but those aromas would struggle to be noticed in the kitchenette buildings, overpowered by the odour of onions and fried potatoes from the building’s shared kitchen, by the odour of garbage in the hall. These creatures may flutter and sing, but it is hard to imagine them doing so ‘down these rooms’ of the kitchenette building. The poet imagines that these creatures, if introduced to such an environment, would be too depressed to behave in their usual magical manner.

This image powerfully suggests that the kitchenette building is no place for dreams or dreamers. The residents simply lack the resources to dwell upon their hopes and dreams, let alone to make those aspirations a reality.

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**A CLOSER READING**

**POVERTY**

‘kitchenette building’ is a powerful study of poverty. It depicts a world where people are concerned, above all, by the struggle to survive, by the need to pay rent or put food on the table. The building’s residents, we sense, are utterly preoccupied by such concerns and can think about little else.

The description of the residents as ‘gray’ reinforces our sense of their misery, suggesting lives that are dull, monotonous and repetitive. The image of being ‘grayed in’, meanwhile, suggests their sense of being trapped and confined. We imagine them being surrounded on all sides by some dull grey substance, which suggests that they can never escape their poverty-stricken lives.

**THE POWER OF DREAMS**

Brooks presents the dreams of the residents as physical presences, almost as if they were strange, magical creatures.
- These creatures, as she imagines them, are truly spectacular. They have a wonderful aroma, flutter through the air like butterflies and sing beautiful ‘arias’ like opera singers. This suggests the extraordinary nature of hopes and dreams, how they bring joy and colour to our lives.
- Brooks and her fellow residents could ‘let’ these creatures ‘in’ to the kitchenette building. This suggests how the people of the kitchenette building could permit themselves to hope and dream, how they could start to imagine a better life for themselves.
- Brooks and her fellow residents could tend to these creatures, keeping them ‘warm’ and ‘very clean’. This suggests that hopes and dreams need to be nurtured, that we must work hard in order to make them a reality.
- Some residents, however, are not ‘willing’ to let these creatures in. This suggests that the people of the kitchenette building are unwilling to let themselves dream, perhaps fearing defeat and disappointment.
- Others simply don’t have time to nurture such a creature. This suggests that the people of the kitchenette building simply don’t have time to work on making their dreams a reality. They are too busy attempting to survive in the face of grinding poverty and racial discrimination.

The poet wonders if these creatures would survive and thrive in the environment of the kitchenette building. ‘Even if’ the residents were willing to let them in.

This image powerfully suggests that the kitchenette building is no place for dreams or dreamers. The residents simply lack the resources to dwell upon their hopes and dreams, let alone to make those aspirations a reality.
Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Annotations
Ozymandias: another name for Rameses the Great, pharaoh of the nineteenth dynasty of ancient Egypt
[1] antique land: an ancient kingdom or civilisation, in this case Egypt
[2] trunkless: lacking a torso
[3] visage: face
[4] sneer of cold command: describes Ozymandias’s facial expression
[5] well those passions read: the sculptor understood Ozymandias’s emotions and motivations
[7] pedestal: the base of the statue
[8] king of kings: the inscription declares Ozymandias to be the greatest ruler on earth
[9] ye Mighty: the inscription may be addressing God or gods, or other great rulers
[10] colossal: huge, enormous
[11] boundless: unlimited, endless; in this case seeming to go on forever
[12] solo: lonely, desolate

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 to 1818) was one of the major English Romantic poets, and is critically regarded as being among the finest lyric poets in the English language. He was expelled from Oxford in 1810 for writing a pamphlet entitled The Necessity of Atheism. He married the sixteen-year-old Harriet Westbrook, but left her after a few years to elope to Switzerland with the equally young Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin in 1814. It was in Geneva in 1816 that Shelley and Mary married and spent considerable time with Shelley’s fellow poet Lord Byron. In 1818 the Shelleys moved to Italy, and it was here – shortly before his 30th birthday – that Shelley drowned at sea during a fierce storm.
Tease It Out

1. The poet describes meeting a man who has just returned from a trip to an ‘antique’ land. What do you think he means by an ‘antique’ land? What country has the traveller returned from?

2. The traveller describes seeing two ‘trunkless legs of stone’. What does it mean to be ‘trunkless’? Can you quickly sketch a picture of what the traveller is describing here?

3. What word does the poet use to tell us that the legs of the statue are enormous?

4. The traveller also came across a ‘shattered visage’. What is a ‘visage’? What does he mean when he says that this visage was ‘Half sunk’?

5. The traveller says that the face had a ‘sneer of cold command’. What does this suggest about the kind of ruler Ozymandias was? Do you think he was a kind and compassionate man?

6. The traveller says that you can get a sense of how skilful the sculptor was from the detail on the statue’s face. What does he mean when he says that the sculptor ‘read’ Ozymandias’ ‘passions’ ‘well’?

7. What are the ‘lifeless things’ that the traveller mentions? What is ‘stamped’ on these things?

8. Class Discussion: The traveller says a ‘hand’ mocked the passions of Ozymandias. Is he referring to the hand of the sculptor, the hand of God, or to the hand of Ozymandias himself?

9. According to the traveller a ‘heart’ ‘fed’ Ozymandias’s ‘passion’. Whose heart do you think the traveller is referring to?

10. In your own words, rewrite the inscription that appears on the statue’s pedestal. Who do you think came up with the text of the inscription: the sculptor or Ozymandias?

11. Ozymandias calls upon the ‘Mighty’ to ‘Look on [his] works’ and ‘despair’. What do you think Ozymandias means by the ‘Mighty’? Why does he tell these ‘Mighty’ people to ‘despair’ when they look at his ‘works’?

12. The traveller describes what surrounds this broken statue. Describe in your own words the landscape as he presents it.

13. What do you think might once have existed here?

Theme Talk

1. Class Discussion: ‘The poem condemns the hubris of anyone who thinks that their work will last forever’. Do you agree with this sentiment? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Theme Talk: The poem holds the sculptor in high regard, praising his work. What does the poem suggest about the power and significance of art? Is there a suggestion that great works of art can endure far longer than kingdoms and empires?

3. Think about the title of the poem and answer the following questions.
   • Why do you think Shelley might have chosen this title?
   • Think of an alternative title for this poem and explain your choice.

4. Exam Prep: In your opinion, what does Shelley say about power in his poem ‘Ozymandias’?

Language Lab

1. Can you think of any modern buildings or monuments that represent something similar to the statue that the poem describes? Do you think that these buildings or monuments will still be around in centuries to come? Give reasons for your answer.

2. What features of the sonnet form can you identify in this poem?

3. Class Discussion: What do you understand by ‘irony’? Why might the combination of the inscription and the statement ‘Nothing beside remained’ be an ironic one?
FIRST ENCOUNTER

The poet met a traveller from Egypt. The poet describes Egypt as an ‘antique land’, a place with a long and rich history. The traveller tells the poet that he was making his way across the Egyptian desert when he came across the remains of an enormous statue.

The legs of the statue are still standing, but its trunk or torso are long gone: ‘Two vast and trunkless legs of stone/ Stand in the desert’. The face of the statue lies near the legs, broken and half covered by the sand: ‘Near them on the sand,/ Half sunk, a shattered visage lies’.

The traveller praises the sculptor who carved the statue. He believes that the sculptor ‘read’ or understood the ‘passions’ or emotions that drove Ozymandias perfectly: ‘well those passions read’. He captured the personality of this great and terrible ruler and ‘stamped’ it onto ‘lifeless’ stone.

The traveller describes how a hand ‘mocked’ the ‘passions’ of Ozymandias. This may refer to how the sculptor used his handiwork not only to glorify Ozymandias but also to make fun of him. For the sculptor revealed Ozymandias as he really is, capturing his cruel and arrogant personality. The traveller suggests that Ozymandias was a truly unpleasant individual, whose cruel ‘passions’ were ‘fed’ by his very heart, whose wicked impulses came from the very core of his personality.

Ozymandias was a Greek name for the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses II, who died in the year 1213 BC. Shelley began writing his poem in 1817, soon after the announcement of the British Museum’s acquisition of a large fragment of a statue of Rameses II from the thirteenth century BC. Some scholars believe that Shelley was inspired by this statue.

The traveller describes the appearance of the statue’s face. He says that it was frowning, and that the lips were curled up in an arrogant and contemptuous smile: ‘wrinkled lip and sneer’ of cold command’. The expression on the statue’s face suggests a cruel and despotic overlord.
The legs of the statue stand upon a pedestal, on which some words have been inscribed. The inscription is a message from the very person the statue represents, the pharaoh Ozymandias. Ozymandias declares that he is the ‘king of kings’, the greatest ruler to have ever existed.

The inscription calls on the ‘Mighty’ to look at his great kingdom and envy the magnificence of his achievements: ‘Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’ If the ‘Mighty’ do so, they will be filled with despair, realising that they could never equal Ozymandias. Some readers believe that the term ‘Mighty’ refers to Ozymandias’s rivals and competitors, other great rulers who have come before and since. Others believe that Ozymandias is challenging God Himself.

However, nothing now remains of Ozymandias’ kingdom. There are no towns or cities, no forts or aqueducts. Everything he built has long since passed away. The colossal wreck of the statue stands isolated and broken in the middle of a vast desert. The traveller emphasises the flat and featureless nature of this landscape, describing the sands as bare and level. The desert, he suggests, seems to be boundless, stretching without interruption in every direction. All around the remains of the statue, the ‘lone and level sands stretch far away’.

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

This poem emphasises the ravages of time, reminding us that everything must eventually pass away. Not even great empires such as those constructed by Ozymandias are immune to time’s relentless march. Though they might think themselves invincible when they are at the height of their power, kings and tyrants will die, and the kingdoms and empires they create and command crumble and vanish.

The poem ultimately suggests that whereas kingdoms rise and fall and political power is won and lost, great works of art endure. Ozymandias’ kingdom has long vanished, yet this artist’s sculpture survives. Though commissioned as a statement of power and command, it now lies in the desert, a potent symbol of man’s arrogance and mortality.

HUBRIS

This poem is a powerful study of hubris or over-confidence. Ozymandias believed that his empire would last forever. He believed that the vast network of cities he constructed would put the works of any other ruler to shame. He might even have believed that he was greater than God Himself. But Ozymandias’s confidence, as we have seen, was terribly misplaced. For his empire, like every empire, has crumbled and disappeared.

The poem, then, centres on a contrast or juxtaposition between two very different statements. In line 12 we have Ozymandias’s challenge to the ‘Mighty’, his declaration that he is the greatest king of all time. In the very next line, we have the simple declaration that ‘Noting beside remains’, that the only remnant of his kingdom is a broken face and trunkless legs. Shelley, through juxtaposition, through bringing together two very different lines together, highlights the folly of over-confidence, of claiming mightiness for oneself and immortality for one’s empire.
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SAMPLE PAGES >>>>
Sunlight

There was a sunlit absence.
The helmeted pump in the yard
heated its iron,
water honeyed

in the slung bucket
and the sun stood
like a griddle cooling
against the wall

of each long afternoon.
So, her hands scuffled
over the bakeboard,
the reddening stove

sent its plaque of heat
against her where she stood
in a floury apron
by the window.

Now she dusts the board
with a goose’s wing,
own sits, broad-lapped,
with whitened nails

and measling shins:
here is a space
again, the scone rising
to the tick of two clocks.

And here is love
like a tinsmith’s scoop
sunk past its gleam
in the meal-bin.
Tease It Out

1. Where is the poem set? What time of year do you imagine it is? Give a reason for your answer.

2. Heaney introduces the figure of his aunt in stanza 3. What is the aunt doing? What does the word ‘scuffled’ suggest about the way she works?

3. The speaker describes his aunt as ‘broad-lapped’. What does this suggest about her, and about the speaker’s perception of her? Is she maternal or girlish, strong or dainty? Explain your answer.

4. Consider the poet’s description of the yard outside the kitchen in the first two stanzas. From what vantage point do you imagine the yard is being viewed?

5. Describe in your own words the effect that the sunlight has on the pump and the water coming out of it.

6. To what does the poet compare the sun in stanza 2? What similarities can this item be said to have to the sun?

7. Consider the phrase ‘the wall/ / of each long afternoon.’ What ‘wall’ can the sun be said to be ‘cooling/ against’ on a long afternoon? What does the word ‘wall’ suggest about the force of the afternoon’s heat?

8. What does the speaker’s aunt use to clean up after her work?

9. Why do you think that the tinsmith’s scoop, symbolising love, is ‘sunk past its gleam’? Pair with a classmate and consider the following possibilities, ranking them in order of likelihood:
   • The love between them is ‘sunk past its gleam’ because it’s past its best.
   • It represents how firmly this familial love is embedded in both of them.
   • The love between them is ‘sunk past its gleam’ because although they don’t verbalise it with fancy words (‘gleam’), they both still know it’s there.

10. The speaker notes three ways that his aunt’s work has temporarily altered her appearance. Describe each in your own words.

11. Line 22: ‘here is a space’. What does it say about the poet’s aunt that she only allows herself to sit down after the scones are put in the oven and the workspace cleared up?

12. Line 24: ‘to the tick of two clocks.’ Why do you think the poet specifically mentions two clocks? What might the two clocks ticking in harmony together symbolise?

Exam Prep

1. Personal Response: Write a short poem or text describing a treasured memory from your own childhood, one that you find yourself returning to from time to time.

2. Class Discussion: ‘There was a sunlit absence’. Who or what do you think is absent from this scene? Does Heaney present this absence in a positive or a negative light?

3. Theme Talk: ‘In several of his poems, Heaney celebrates ordinary, everyday physical work and the quiet mastery of older men and women’. Discuss this statement with reference to ‘Sunlight’ and at least two other poems on your course.

4. Exam Prep: ‘In Heaney’s work, familial love is often unspoken. If love is expressed at all, it’s usually through gestures rather than words’. Do you agree with this statement? Write a short essay in response, referring to ‘Sunlight’ and at least three other poems on your course.

Language Lab

1. ‘Heaney presents the pump as a ‘helmeted’ soldier protecting the safety of the household’. Do you find this statement plausible or utterly fanciful? Explain your answer.

2. Heaney compares the heat that emerges from the heating oven to a ‘plaque’. Do you find this to be an effective metaphor? Can you identify another moment in the poem where Heaney compares heat to a tangible, solid structure?

3. Do you find the images of the cast iron water pump, goose-wing duster, tinsmith’s scoop and meal-bin to be striking images or are they humble and everyday? What do you think Heaney saw in them that led him to highlight them in the poem?
The Universe is a House Party

The universe is expanding. Look: postcards
And panties, bottles with lipstick on the rim,
Orphan socks and napkins dried into knots.
Quickly, wordlessly, all of it whisked into file

With radio waves from a generation ago
Drifting to the edge of what doesn’t end,
Like the air inside a balloon. Is it bright?
Will our eyes crimp shut? Is it molten, atomic,
A conflagration of suns? It sounds like the kind of party
Your neighbors forget to invite you to: bass throbbing

Through walls, and everyone thudding around drunk
On the roof. We grind lenses to an impossible strength,
Point them toward the future, and dream of beings
We’ll welcome with indefatigable hospitality:

How marvellous you’ve come! We won’t flinch
At the pinprick mouths, the nubbin limbs. We’ll rise,
Gracile, robust. Mi casa es su casa. Never more sincere.
Seeing us, they’ll know exactly what we mean.

Of course, it’s ours. If it’s anyone’s, it’s ours.
1. The poem opens by mentioning the expanding universe and then moves immediately to picture the aftermath of a house party. What condition is the house in after the party?

2. In what sense might it seem as if the expanding universe resembles a house in the aftermath of a fairly wild party?

3. With distant galaxies and yet unknown alien life forms in mind, what might Smith mean when she compares the universe to a party to which we have not been invited?

4. What is meant by ‘we’ in this case?

5. Who are the ‘neighbors’ who apparently forgot to invite us to this wild party?

6. For what purpose do we ‘grind lenses to an impossible strength’?

7. In what sense do we ‘point our lenses toward the future’? What might we be looking for?

8. According to the poem, if we do eventually encounter alien life forms, how do we believe we will treat them?

9. Do we believe that we will be shocked by these alien visitors?

10. According to Smith, how might we expect these visitors to look?

11. Do you think that these descriptions of the aliens’ physical appearance are likely to be realistic or instead drawn from imagination and science fiction?

12. According to your interpretation of the poem, when we tell these visitors that they should make themselves at home, how realistic or sincere are we being?

13. Do you think that Smith’s description of how we might greet our alien visitors (see lines 15 to 18) is meant literally or ironically? Give reasons for your answer.

14. The poem concludes with an ambiguous statement. Do you think it means:
   • That we love our home planet and will therefore be glad that the visitors have come to see it?
   • That our territorial sense of ownership will probably be the most important factor in our initial response to the visitors?
   Give reasons for your answer.

--

1. Personal Response: In an interview, Smith recalled how she felt when a friend suggested that although there might be many extraterrestrial life forms in the universe, their distance from us would mean that they would no longer exist by the time we reached them. How does this suggestion make you feel? How is it reflected in this poem?

2. Class Discussion: Starting off with the idea of the universe as a sort of house party at which we might meet interesting guests, Smith builds up a picture of our search for intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. Is the poem essentially optimistic, or does it reveal anxieties about any encounter we might have with extraterrestrial life forms? Give reasons for your answer.

3. Theme Talk: Smith’s father was an engineer who worked on NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope. Life on Mars, the collection in which this poem appears, is in part Smith’s tribute to her father’s life’s work.
   • Do you think that science can provide suitable images and topics for poetry?
   • Why do you think poetry and science have often been isolated from each other in the past?
   • How might poetry and science benefit from greater engagement with each other?
Nikki Rosa

childhood remembrances are always a drag
if you’re Black
you always remember things like living in Woodlawn
with no inside toilet
and if you become famous or something
they never talk about how happy you were to have
your mother
all to yourself and
how good the water felt when you got your bath
from one of those
big tubs that folk in Chicago barbecue in
and somehow when you talk about home
it never gets across how much you
understood their feelings
as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale
and even though you remember
your biographers never understand
your father’s pain as he sells his stock
and another dream goes
And though you’re poor it isn’t poverty that
concerns you
and though they fought a lot
it isn’t your father’s drinking that makes any difference
but only that everybody is together and you
and your sister have happy birthdays and very good
Christmases
and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they’ll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy

Annotations
Nikki Rosa: the poet adopts the surname of Rosa Parks (1913-2005), who helped initiate the civil rights movement in the United States when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.

[3] Woodlawn: a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio, where the Giovanni family lived for a short while

[15] Hollydale: an all-black housing development in Cincinnati. The poet’s father had invested money in this development and had expected to set up home there. Due to financial complications, the father was forced to sell his stock in the development.
Tease It Out

1. The poet remembers a period during which her family lived in a development called 'Woodlawn'. How do you learn that this was a far-from-luxurious development?
2. Suggest why the poet might have had her mother all to herself during this time. How did she feel about this at the time?
3. The poet recalls how she was bathed in a big tub:
   - Do you imagine this happening inside or outside? Give a reason for your answer.
   - Did the young poet enjoy these bathtimes?
   - To what other uses were such tubs put?
4. The poet’s father, along with a number of other ordinary Africans, invested in a project called ‘Hollydale’:
   - What feelings might the older members of the family have experienced in relation to this project?
   - True or false: The young Nikki didn’t understand these feelings.
   - How did the father feel when he had to pull out of the investment?
5. The poet describes her family life:
   - True or false: The poet’s family were moderately wealthy.
   - True or false: The poet’s parents had a blissfully happy marriage.
   - True or false: The father had substance-abuse problems.
   - True or false: These problems were outweighed by the good times that the family enjoyed.
6. The poet imagines a white critic writing about her life and work:
   - What aspect of her childhood does she think such a critic would overlook?
   - What aspect of Black society would such an author probably be unaware of?
   - Would Giovanni prefer to be written about by a white person or a fellow black person?

Exam Prep

1. Class Discussion: This poem provides a rounded picture of a difficult childhood, illustrating both its highs and lows. Discuss this statement as a class.
2. Theme Talk: This poem also highlights the problems that occur when one culture writes about another.
   - Suggest why white critics tend to focus on the negative aspects of Black childhoods.
   - Is this an example of stereotyping?
   - Suggest why Giovanni might find such a focus frustrating.
   - Is Irish culture ever misunderstood or misrepresented like this by non-Irish critics and audiences?
3. Exam Prep: Imagine you have been asked to suggest a poem for a new collection entitled Family Love. Explain why you would choose the poem, ‘Nikki Rosa’ as part of the collection.

Language Lab

1. ‘[C]hildhood remembrances are always a drag’. Is this how Black writers and artists actually remember things, or is it how their ‘remembrances’ are presented by white critics?
2. Consider the poem’s title, which draws a contrast between the poet herself and Rosa Parks.
   - Is the poet suggesting that her childhood was harder or easier than that of Rosa Parks?
   - In what sense does the title fit with the blinkered views of white critics when they write about Black lives?
3. ‘Giovanni’s loose, informal lines generate a sense of intimacy. We feel we are listening in on a private conversation or even to the poet’s own thoughts’.
   - Write a paragraph in response to this statement.
4. Consider the phrase ‘Black love is Black wealth’. What does it suggest about the values of the community in which Giovanni was raised? What does it suggest about the strategies adopted by underprivileged communities in order to survive?
In Praise of My Sister

My sister doesn’t write poems.
and it’s unlikely that she’ll suddenly start writing poems.
She takes after her mother, who didn’t write poems,
and also her father, who likewise didn’t write poems.
I feel safe beneath my sister’s roof:
my sister’s husband would rather die than write poems.
And, even though this is starting to sound as repetitive as Peter Piper,
the truth is, none of my relatives write poems.

My sister’s desk drawers don’t hold old poems,
and her handbag doesn’t hold new ones,
When my sister asks me over for lunch,
I know she doesn’t want to read me her poems.
Her soups are delicious without ulterior motives.
Her coffee doesn’t spill on manuscripts.

There are many families in which nobody writes poems,
but once it starts up it’s hard to quarantine.
Sometimes poetry cascades down through the generations,
creating fatal whirlpools where family love may founder.
My sister has tackled oral prose with some success.
but her entire written opus consists of postcards from vacations
whose text is only the same promise every year:
when she gets back, she’ll have
so much
much
much to tell.

Translated by Claire Cavanagh and Stanslaw Baranczek

Annotations
[14] manuscripts: the original hand-written or typed version of a document that has not yet been printed
[18] founder: (literally, of a boat) fill with water and sink; (metaphorically) to fail or be wrecked
Tease It Out

1. Is the poet the only person in her family who writes poetry?
2. **True or false:** There is a slight possibility that the poet’s brother-in-law will take up poetry.
3. Are you familiar with the rhyme called ‘Peter Piper’? Suggest why the poet might feel that her poem is starting to resemble this rhyme. Does she think that this resemblance is a good thing?
4. What lines or phrases suggest that the lives of poets tend to be completely dominated by poetry?
5. Sometimes people have ‘ulterior motives’ when they ask the poet to lunch. Can you suggest what these ulterior motives might be?
6. **Class Discussion:** In what sense are the sister’s soups personified in these lines? In the opinion of the class, is this an effective example of personification?
7. The poet compares poetry to a virus or disease.
   - **True or false:** An interest in poetry, like a virus, spreads easily between family members.
   - The poet suggests that quarantining might be necessary to stop this spread. What kind of measures do you think she has in mind?
   - Is this a serious or a playful comparison? Give a reason for your answer.
8. **Class Discussion:** Focus on the word ‘cascades’.
   - What does it mean for water to ‘cascade’? In what sense, according to the poet, does an interest in poetry ‘cascade’? In the opinion of the class, is this an effective comparison?
9. A shared interest in poetry can sometimes lead to problems within a family. What metaphor does the poet use to describe this?
10. What is the only form of writing that the poet’s sister practices?
11. What ‘promise’ does the poet’s sister make every year? Is it a promise that she keeps, in your opinion?

Exam Prep

1. **Class Discussion:** The poet feels ‘safe’ in her sister’s house. Why she might feel threatened in the houses of her fellow poets? Rank the following in order of plausibility:
   - Poetry is her job, and she wants to talk about something else when she socialises.
   - Her fellow poets don’t appreciate or understand her poetry the way her sister does.
   - She’s worried that her fellow poets will make her listen to their bad poems.
   - She’s worried that her fellow poets might ask her for a favour.
2. **Theme Talk:** ‘Unlike many writers and artists, the poet doesn’t put her fellow practitioners on a pedestal’. Write a paragraph in response to this statement.
3. **Exam Prep:** What does the poem tell us about the relationship between the poet and her sister? Write a paragraph describing their relationship as you imagine it.
4. **Exam Prep:** Do the language and imagery used by the poet add to your enjoyment of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the language and imagery used in the poem.

Language Lab

1. Does this poem put forward a positive or negative view of poetry as an art form? Pick two or three phrases from the poem to support your answer.
2. Consider the poem’s tone. Is it serious or light-hearted? Do you think the poet wants us to take her complaints about poetry seriously? Give a reason for your answer.
3. **Class Discussion:** Consider the phrase ‘oral prose’:
   - Working as a class, define this term in your own words.
   - Is it true that everybody uses ‘oral prose’?
   - Which phrases suggest that the poet’s sister is a talkative and amusing person?
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SAMPLE PAGES >>>>
Flourish.
Enter King DUNCAN, LENNOX, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, and Attendants

DUNCAN
Is execution done on Cawdor? Or not
Those in commission yet returned?

MALCOLM
My liege,
They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
With one that saw him die, who did report
That very frankly he confessed his treasons,
Implored your highness’ pardon, and set forth
A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it. He died
As one that had been studied in his death
To throw away the dearest thing he owed,
As ‘twere a careless trifle.

DUNCAN
There’s no art
To find the mind’s construction in the face;
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.

[Enter MACBETH, BANQUO, ROSS, and ANGUS]

O worthiest cousin,
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me. Thou art so far before
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
That the proportion both of thanks, and payment,
Might have been mine; only I have left to say,
More is thy due, than more than all can pay.

MACBETH
The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it, pays itself.
Your highness’ part, is to receive our duties;
And our duties are to your throne and state,
Children and servants, which do but what they should
By doing everything safe toward your love
And honour.
DUNCAN
Welcome hither:
I have begun to plant thee, and will labour
To make thee full of growing. —Noble Banquo,
That hast no less deserved, nor must be known
No less to have done so—let me enfold thee,
And hold thee to my heart.

BANQUO
There if I grow,
The harvest is your own.

DUNCAN
My plenteous joys,
Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves
In drops of sorrow. —Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland; which honour must
Not unaccompanied invest him only,
But signs of nobleness like stars shall shine
On all deservers. From hence to Inverness,
And bind us further to you.

MACBETH
The rest is labour, which is not used for you;
I'll be myself the harbinger and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach.
So humbly take my leave.

DUNCAN
My worthy Cawdor.

MACBETH [aside]
The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'er-leap,
For in my way it lies. Stars hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires,
The eye wink at the hand—yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.
Exit

DUNCAN
True, worthy Banquo; he is full so valiant,
And in his commendations I am fed,
It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome;
It is a peerless kinsman.

Flourish. Exeunt
Macbeth

Act 3

Scene 2

46

Lady Macbeth reflects

A number of hours have passed since the previous scene. It is now the afternoon of the day of the banquet and Banquo has gone out riding with his son. Banquo has been staying with the Macbeths and is to be the guest of honour at their feast this evening.

Lady Macbeth is speaking with a servant. She asks if Banquo has left the castle: ‘Is Banquo gone from court?’ (1) The servant tells her that he has and will be returning later in the evening. (2) Lady Macbeth then asks the servant to tell the King that she would like to speak with him. (3-4)

Left alone, Lady Macbeth reflects upon what has become of their lives since they became King and Queen. They have achieved their ambition but they no longer have peace of mind and security. As such, she feels they have gained nothing and lost everything: ‘Nought’s had, all’s spent,/ Where our desire is got without content’. (5-6) They cannot
relax and enjoy what they have because at any moment they could be attacked by forces opposed to their rule.

Lady Macbeth feels that it would be preferable to be dead, just like the murdered Duncan. At least then they would be safe from harm and would not have to live in doubt and fear: “’Tis safer to be that which we destroy,/ Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy”. (7-8)

MACBETH’S TROUBLED MIND

When Macbeth arrives, the Queen asks him how he is. It seems that Macbeth has been spending a lot of time alone, dwelling on his worries: ‘why do you keep alone,/ Of sorriest fancies your companions making’. (9-10) Lady Macbeth encourages him to forget about the dreadful things they have done, telling him that thoughts of their murderous deed ought to have died when Duncan died: ‘those thoughts which should indeed have died/ With them they think on’. (11-2)

There is no use thinking about things that are done and cannot be changed: ‘Things without all remedy/ Should be without regard’. (12-3) But Lady Macbeth’s words do nothing to soothe Macbeth. It is not the murder of Duncan that is troubling him, but thoughts of his enemies. (14)

Murdering Duncan might have gained Macbeth the crown, but it was not enough to secure his safety. Duncan’s sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, for example, still live and have fled to England and Ireland. There is every chance that they will look to return to Scotland to avenge their father’s murder. Macbeth must also be suspicious of the loyalty of his thanes. Macduff, for example, did not attend his coronation, and his absence would certainly have been noted. It is quite possible that some of his thanes are secretly conspiring against him, biding their time until the moment is right to overthrow him.

As it stands, however, those who pose a threat to Macbeth are scattered, remote and relatively powerless. But it is only a matter of time before they regroup or band together and become more powerful. Macbeth compares the threat to a snake that he has wounded but not killed: ‘We have scorched the snake, not killed it’. (14) He imagines the snake hiding itself away, taking its time to recover and regain its strength. In a matter of time it will fully recover and become dangerous once again: ‘She’ll close, and be herself’. (15) Macbeth’s kingship, secured by criminal means, remains in constant danger of vengeful attack: ‘our poor malice/ Remains in danger of her former tooth’. (15-6)

Living in constant fear of such vengeance is intolerable. Mirroring his wife’s sentiments at the beginning of the scene, Macbeth says they would be better off dead than to continue existing like this. Those that they have killed in order to secure the crown now enjoy a greater degree of peace than they: ‘Better be with the dead,/ Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace’. (21-2) Duncan sleeps peacefully in his grave, untroubled by fears of foreign or domestic attack. In contrast the Macbeths cannot enjoy their meals or sleep without experiencing ‘terrible dreams’. (19-20)

Macbeth is unwilling to tolerate this life of fear and uncertainty any longer. He pledges to bring chaos and destruction to the heavens and the earth, if that’s what it takes to secure peace of mind: ‘let the frame of things disjoint –/ Both the worlds suffer’. (17-8)

Lady Macbeth is troubled by her husband’s behaviour and manner of speaking. She is conscious of the fact that they are holding a banquet this evening for the Scottish lords and she hopes that her husband will be able to behave in a convivial manner when the guests arrive: ‘Gentle my lord, sleek o’er your rugged looks,/ Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight’. (30-1)

MACBETH SPEAKS OF BANQUO

When Macbeth assures his wife that he will be fine. (32) He asks that she pay particular attention to Banquo at the banquet: ‘Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue’. (34) As we saw in the previous
scene, it is Banquo that Macbeth now perceives to pose the greatest threat to his position as king: ‘Our fears in Banquo/ Stick deep’. (3.1.48-9) It is important, Macbeth tells his wife, that they flatter him and disguise their true feelings until the threat has been eliminated. (35-7)

Lady Macbeth tells her husband that he must stop being paranoid: ‘You must leave this’. (38) But Macbeth’s mind is riddled with thoughts of his enemies and he cannot stop thinking of the threats that they pose: ‘O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife’. (39) He tells her that Banquo and Fleance are still alive, as if to suggest that, as long as this is the case, he can never find peace. (40)

Lady Macbeth tries to soothe her husband by telling him that Banquo and Fleance will not live forever, that their lease on life is not eternal: ‘But in them nature’s copy’s not eterne’. (41) Macbeth interprets this to mean that they can be killed: ‘There’s comfort yet, they are assailable’. (42) Of course, Macbeth has already given orders to have Banquo and his son killed. (3.1.125-35) He knows that they will be murdered as they make their way back to the castle this evening to attend the banquet. Lady Macbeth, however, is unaware of these plans.

Assuming that his wife meant that Banquo and Fleance can be killed to ensure their security, Macbeth tells her to be cheerful. (43) He hints at the fact that he has already made plans to have them murdered this very evening, telling her that before nightfall some dreadful deed will be done: ‘there shall be done/ A deed of dreadful note’. (46-7)

Lady Macbeth, however, does not – or else pretends not to – understand what her husband is saying, asking ‘What’s to be done?’ (47) Her response seems to make it clear to Macbeth that she no longer has the will or the strength to be part of such murderous plans. He, therefore, tells her to remain ‘innocent’ of his plans until they have been executed: ‘Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,/ Till thou applaud the deed’. (48-9)

MACBETH CALLS ON THE DARK FORCES

Just as he did before murdering Duncan, Macbeth now psyches himself up ahead of the night’s business. Although his wife is still present, he begins to speak in a strange and sinister manner, calling on the night to wrap itself around the day and blind it to the evil deed that is to occur. (49-50) He associates the night with murder and violence and imagines that it will somehow act as his agent or assist him in his bloody endeavours: ‘with thy bloody and invisible hand/ Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond/ Which keeps me pale’. (51-3)

To Macbeth, daytime represents goodness and virtue. He associates it with pity and tenderness: ‘the tender eye of pitiful day’. (50) However, when night falls, it is as if the forces of good go to sleep, enabling the dark forces to emerge and act: ‘Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,/ While night’s black agents to their preys do rouse’. (55-6)

Lady Macbeth has been all the while listening to her husband, and she seems to be startled by his manner of speech: ‘Thou marvell’st at my words’. (57) He tells her to be patient and to wait and see: ‘hold thee still’. (57) He assures her that it is necessary that they commit further crimes in order to strengthen and safeguard their position. They committed murder to gain the throne and the only way they are going to hold onto it now is by committing further criminal acts: ‘Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill’. (58-9)
MACBETH

PARANOIA AND INSECURITY
Macbeth now lives in a constant state of fear. As his wife remarks, he spends much of his time alone, dwelling on his worries. (9-10) His mind is filled with thoughts of those he imagines pose a threat to him: ‘full of scorpions is my mind’. (39) He also fears that it is only a matter of time before forces opposed to his reign gain enough power to come to avenge the old King’s murder. (15-6)

Living like this, in constant fear, has become unbearable to Macbeth. He cannot enjoy his meals and experiences nightmares every time he sleeps. He pledges, therefore, to do whatever is necessary to restore peace of mind. (17-21)

DESCENT INTO TYRANNY
The idea of behaving like a good king and being perceived as such no longer seems important to Macbeth. Having committed a heinous crime to secure the throne, Macbeth now believes that the only way to hold on to it is to commit further evil: ‘Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill’. (58) He is willing to destroy the world, to create a state of chaos and suffering, if it means he can be safe and secure: ‘let the frame of things disjoint –/ Both the worlds suffer’. (17-8)

TORTURED BY HIS CRIMES
Despite the fact that he is now committed to doing greater evil to secure his position, we get a slight indication that committing such crimes does not come naturally to Macbeth. It seems that the King is still troubled by his conscience. Towards the end of the scene he speaks of a ‘bond’ that keeps him ‘pale’. (52-3) We might imagine that this bond is his connection to the rest of humanity, that tender tie that enables us to feel pity and sympathy for others. In a manner reminiscent of Lady Macbeth’s plea to the evil ‘spirits’ in Act 1 Scene 5, Macbeth calls on the forces of darkness to ‘ Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond/ Which keeps me pale’. (49-53) Macbeth wishes to destroy this bond, so that he can begin to act without hesitation and without being troubled by remorse and guilt.

LADY MACBETH

THE DOMINANT FORCE IN THE MARRIAGE
In this scene we get a sense of how weary and unhappy Lady Macbeth has become. She is tired of living in constant fear and now thinks that she and her husband would be better off dead. She is also concerned about Macbeth, who seems to be spending much of his time alone. (5-10)

Lady Macbeth knows that the threats to their reign are real. She knows that there are legitimate reasons to fear people such as Banquo. She might think that Macbeth is spending far too much time fretting about these matters, but that does not mean that she thinks they ought to be ignored.

However, Lady Macbeth no longer has the will or the strength to be involved in doing what is necessary to eliminate or neutralize these threats. When Macbeth strongly hints at his plans to have Macbeth and Fleance killed, she asks ‘What’s to be done’, as if she is unwilling or unable to be party to such crimes again. (47)

Whereas once Lady Macbeth had the ambition and the will to push her husband to commit murder, she now seems happy to remain ignorant of his crimes. Macbeth, in turn, is content to act alone, telling her to be ‘innocent of the knowledge’ until his dreadful deeds are done. (48) His words remind us of the manner in which Lady Macbeth spoke to him in advance of Duncan’s murder. Back then she told him to leave matters in her hands, that she would take charge of the murderous act deemed necessary to secure the throne: ‘you shall put/ This night’s great business into my dispatch’. (1.5.64-5) Now the roles have reversed and it is Macbeth who has taken charge of their bloody affairs.
THE STRUCTURE OF SCOTTISH KINGSHIP

Scottish kings were chosen by a mixture of inheritance and election. When a Scottish king died, his successor was elected by the thanes or lords of the realm. However, this was not a complete democracy because the king could only come from a set number of families with royal blood. This process of selection sets the Scottish kingship apart from that of other countries, where the king’s eldest son automatically succeeded him.

Macbeth, being Duncan’s cousin, is of royal blood. It’s possible that he could be chosen as Duncan’s successor when the time comes. Macbeth has clearly harboured ambitions in this regard: ‘Thou wouldst be great,/ Art not without ambition … wouldst not play false,/ And yet wouldst wrongly win’. (1.5.15-9) But outwardly at least he claims it’s exceptionally unlikely that he will ever be king: ‘To be King/ Stands not within the prospect of belief.’ (1.3.72-3)

In Act 1 Scene 4, Duncan nominates his eldest son Malcolm as his preferred heir. This makes it highly probable that when Duncan passes away, the thanes will honour his wishes and choose Malcolm as his successor: ‘Sons, kinsmen, thanes … We will establish our estate upon/ Our eldest, Malcolm’. (1.4.36-9) Macbeth is quick to realise the obstacle this nomination presents to his ambitions. Prior to this announcement, Macbeth had considered simply waiting until Duncan died of natural causes, in the hope that he might succeed him: ‘If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me,/ Without my stir’. (1.3.43-4) In the wake of Malcolm’s nomination however, this is no longer an option. If Macbeth is to gain the kingship he must act aggressively, removing not only Duncan but also Malcolm from the equation: ‘The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step/ On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap,/ For in my way it lies’. (1.4.49-51)

THE ROLE OF THE KING

1. Bestows honours and receives loyal service in return

The king’s lords or thanes were bound to serve him loyally and faithfully. As Macbeth puts it, ‘Your highness’ part, is to receive our duties;/ And our duties are to your throne and state,/ Children and servants’. (1.4.24-26) The king’s duty in return is to honour those who serve him, granting them titles, lands, and riches.

We see this when Macbeth is rewarded for his role in defeating the rebels by being made Thane of Cawdor: ‘Go pronounce his present death,/ And with his former title greet Macbeth’. (1.2.65-6) Similarly, Malcolm is quick to reward the thanes for their help in defeating Macbeth by making them earls: ‘Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland/ In such an honour named’. (5.9.29-30)

This system of homage involved displays of loyalty and affection, combined with long and flowery speeches. The thanes would publicly pledge their faithful service to the king, who would reciprocate by effusively praising the thanes’ fine and noble qualities.

- Duncan is quick to praise the captain who was wounded in his service: ‘So well thy words become thee as thy wounds,/ They smack of honour both’. (1.2.43-44)
- Duncan makes an elaborate speech wherein he chides himself for having been slow to acknowledge Macbeth’s service, declaring that, ‘More is thy due, than more than all can pay’. (1.4.21)
- Duncan offers a similar public display of gratitude and affection to Banquo: ‘let me enfold thee,/ And hold thee to my heart’. (1.4.32-3)
- Yet another effusive display of gratitude is addressed to Lady Macbeth when Duncan thanks her for her service in hosting him: ‘the love/ That follows us sometime is our trouble,/ Which still we thank as love’. (1.6.11-3)

A king was also expected to give and receive hospitality. King Duncan, for instance, honours Macbeth by visiting his castle of Inverness: ‘From hence to Inverness,/ And bind us further to you’. (1.4.43-4) During his stay in Macbeth’s castle he is the...
perfect guest. He thanks Lady Macbeth for her trouble, rewards her with the gift of a diamond and sends gifts to the servants’ quarters. (2.1.14-7) King Edward, too, is associated with hospitality and is praised for the welcome he gives the exiled Malcolm. (3.6.24-9)

2. Maintains order among the nobility

Another of the king’s duties was to maintain order and balance among the nobility. This is brilliantly symbolised by the banquet scene, Act 3 Scene 4. In medieval times rank, order and ceremony were vitally important. Banquets such as this one were highly ceremonial affairs at which the nobles were seated in order of rank. Each thane had to wait until his superiors were seated before sitting down himself. Similarly, each thane had to wait for those ranked above him to leave the dinner table before standing up himself.

At the beginning of the banquet Macbeth honours these conventions, asking the lords to be seated according to their rank: ‘You know your own degrees, sit down’. (3.4.1) By the end of the banquet, however, these considerations of rank and ceremony have been abandoned. Lady Macbeth urges the thanes to leave the dinner table all at once instead of departing in order of importance: ‘Stand not upon the order of your going,/ But go at once’. (3.4.121-2) Macbeth’s banquet becomes a chaotic affair where the normal rules of society are ignored.

This chaotic end to the gathering represents a breach in the social order. The balance among the thanes is broken, not only that evening but for the remainder of Macbeth’s reign. Gradually, we see them turn against their new ruler, a development that makes governing the country all but impossible for the newly installed king. Under Macbeth’s rule, the structure of society begins to fall apart and Scotland is plunged into chaos.

3. Maintains order in society at large

Perhaps a king’s most important duty was to protect his people and maintain order in society. We see this in Act 1 Scene 2, when Duncan marshals his forces against the rebels and the various invaders that threaten the peace of the realm.
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Sample Pages >>>>
Chapter 2: Paragraphs

What is a paragraph?

A PARAGRAPH IS A COLLECTION OF SENTENCES THAT RELATE TO THE SAME IDEA.

• The subject or topic of a paragraph is often stated in the first sentence, which is called a ‘topic’ sentence.

• The remaining sentences develop this idea and are known as ‘body’ sentences.

• The paragraph is unified, with all the sentences contributing to create a single idea.

• A paragraph is complete when the idea the writer wants to express is brought clearly into focus.

When you write for the Leaving Cert it is vital that you use paragraphs correctly.
Topic sentences and body sentences

The sentence containing a paragraph’s central idea is known as its topic sentence.

In order to come up with an effective topic sentence, you must be clear in your own mind about what you want your paragraph to convey. Here are examples of effective topic sentences:

- Too many film-makers are sacrificing plot and characters – the cornerstones of a good story – in favour of high-octane action and slick special effects.
- We must believe ourselves to be invincible to say that we inhale poisonous smoke into our lungs or turn the ignition in the car when our heads are swimming with drink.
- As a nation, we lead highly sedentary lives and the long-term effects are fast becoming clear.

The topic sentence should usually be the first sentence in your paragraph. The remainder of a paragraph consists of what are known as ‘body’ sentences. These serve the topic sentence by supporting or developing the idea it expresses. The following paragraphs are good examples of how this works:

» EXAMPLE 1

While many might count Gandhi or Mandela among their heroes, it is the fluffy-haired physicist, Albert Einstein, whom I count among mine. Einstein’s pioneering work changed the course of scientific research and has had a massive impact on humanity. And if this weren’t enough, he was also an incredibly compassionate and moral person. He was a staunch defender of human rights and contributed greatly to the civil rights movement in the US at a time of heightened racial tension. He advocated for co-operative and peaceful solutions to conflict in Israel and Palestine as well as warning governments of the dangers of developing nuclear weapons using his E=mc2 research.

» EXAMPLE 2

Few things are capable of affecting us more than alcohol. Just like the influence of the moon on the tides, the command drink has on us is both profound and predictable. Every weekend, scores of us pour onto the streets at night and what follows for many hours after, with the aid of alcohol, is a picture of human stupidity. It seems that no-one is immune. Our A&Es are choked with men and women of all ages who have fallen victim to its unpleasant side effects – drink-driving tragedies, violent brawls and alcohol-related illness. It is an ugly, embarrassing scene and no amount of bravado or cheer can alter this fact.

Sometimes, however, it may be more natural for the topic sentence to be the second or third sentence. In the following examples, the topic sentence is the third sentence:

» EXAMPLE 3

I can remember the stiff feel of the shoes around my feet and the smell of the crisp pages of my new books. I can still feel the anxiety zinging around my stomach as my dad walked me through those imposing gates. My first day of school may have been 14 years ago now, but it has yet to leave my memory. It is something that I remember with particular clarity every September, when I pass the primary school and see the new junior infants waddling into classrooms and wailing for their parents.
**EXAMPLE 4**

Maybe it’s the sensation of sand sliding across your feet. Or maybe it’s the promise of a good night’s sleep after a day spent breathing in the salty sea air. Whatever the key to its allure, I am an avid fan of the beach. I’ve spent my whole life waking up and falling asleep to the swish of the waves on the shore. I’ve left a million footprints in the sand and skimmed a thousand stones across the water. To sit on top of a dune and watch the sun set late on a summer evening is, for me and many others, a little slice of heaven.

As a rule of thumb, however, it is best to have the topic sentence as the first sentence in the paragraph.

**How long should a paragraph be?**

Your paragraphs should be as long as they need to be but not a sentence longer. Each paragraph should be concerned with one central idea. When you’ve said all you wish to communicate regarding that idea it’s time to move on and begin your next paragraph.

There is, therefore, no ‘correct’ length for a paragraph, no rule that says paragraphs should be seven, eight or ten sentences in length. Again and again students make the mistake of writing paragraphs that go on and on. They continue droning about the paragraph’s topic long after they’ve exhausted everything meaningful they have to say about it. Or they write endless paragraphs that ‘mash up’ many different ideas in a way that’s confusing and irritating for the reader. The best way to avoid such mistakes is to plan your composition carefully.

How do I start a new paragraph?

There are two ways to start a new paragraph. You can indent its first line:

> In my opinion, schools need to seriously consider starting up classes in coding and programming. All we are hearing in newspapers and reports is how we need to invest in the ‘smart economy’ to fix the country. The experts are telling us that the IT industry is booming and Ireland has, indeed, attracted top technology companies to its shores. And yet, bizarrely, there is also a shortage in the number of people with these IT skills. Many people, we are told, are not ‘technically literate’ and this prevents them from getting any of the thousands of IT jobs that are available in Ireland. This seems absurd when so many people, both young and old, are forced to emigrate to earn a living.

> Is it right that our education system offers slightly arcane subjects such as Classical Studies and Japanese at Leaving Cert level and yet does not offer courses in coding, programing, graphic design, or even ECD? Should we be offering strictly academic subjects like religion, art history or Latin and yet ignore subjects for which there is a strong demand? With all due respect to the linguistic whiz kids out there, perhaps the languages we should be focusing on now are C++, JavaScript and Ruby?

Alternatively you can skip a line:

> In my opinion, schools need to seriously consider starting up classes in coding and programming. All we are hearing in newspapers and reports is how we need to invest in the ‘smart economy’ to fix the country. The experts are telling us that the IT industry is booming and Ireland has, indeed, attracted top technology companies to its shores. And yet, bizarrely, there is also a shortage in the number of people with these IT skills. Many people, we are told, are not ‘technically literate’ and this prevents them from getting any of the thousands of IT jobs that are available in Ireland. This seems absurd when so many people, both young and old, are forced to emigrate to earn a living.

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Whichever of these paragraph styles you use is entirely up to yourself, but it is important that you are consistent. If you start using an indented style, use the indented style throughout your essay, and the same applies for the skipped-line style.
Exercises

1. What is the function of a ‘topic’ sentence in a paragraph?

2. What are ‘body’ sentences? How do these relate to ‘topic’ sentences?

3. Arrange the following sentences so that they form a coherent paragraph:

   This is a lot for a five-year-old to deal with, but it all goes to hell in a basket when mom or dad announce that they’re leaving and you have to survive the day without them.
   The uniforms are uncomfortable.
   Those new faces and names inspire intense shyness and social anxiety.
   Few things in life traumatise a child more than his or her first day at school.
   Everything about it is new and overwhelming.

4. Arrange the following sentences so that they form a coherent paragraph:

   Every paragraph brings you deeper into the minds of characters who can go on to feel like your best friend or your worst nightmare.
   When you turn the first page you embark on a thrilling adventure, and when you finally close the last one, you mourn its ending and are left hungry for more.
   Nothing is more satisfying than delving into a great book.
   You simply cannot have the same love affair with a movie or television series that you can have with a good novel.

5. Arrange the following sentences so that they form a coherent paragraph:

   But here’s the truth: they once had to start at the same rung of the ladder as you.
   We don’t always feel like pulling on those shorts and runners and heading out into the cold.
   Physical fitness is a challenging but worthwhile pursuit.
   The prospect becomes even less appealing when you know that you’ll have to puff and pant and sweat for an hour or so.
   And those lithe athletes you see swanning effortlessly around don’t make you feel any better about yourself.

6. Arrange the following sentences so that they form a coherent paragraph:

   He possesses all of the qualities of a great anti-hero. His vigilante activities are fuelled primarily out of a desire for revenge. He is not always idealistic or courageous. Batman is one of the finest anti-heroes to grace the pages of a comic book. His intent is not to comfort the people of Gotham City with his crusade, more to terrify its villains — often with brute force and morally dubious tactics. This is what makes him so compelling.
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DID PEOPLE REALLY TALK LIKE THAT?
Shakespeare uses literary devices that ordinary Elizabethan people would not have used in their everyday speech. For example:

**Iambic pentameter**
A form of blank verse where each line contains five regular beats. An example is Romeo’s line from the balcony scene: ‘But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?/ It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.’ (2.2.2-3) Try tapping on the table five times as you say these lines; you should be able to hear the rhythm.

**Rhymed verse**
Shakespeare sometimes uses rhyming couplets; for example, when Romeo first sees Juliet: ‘Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight,/ For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night.’ (1.5.51-2)

**Prose**
Sometimes the dialogue is unversed and has no line breaks, much like the dialogue in a modern play. We see this when Mercutio is talking to Romeo: ‘Why, is not this better now than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo, now art thou what thou art’. (2.4.85-7)

WHY DID SHAKESPEARE WRITE IN VERSE?
Shakespeare’s use of verse in dialogue was an accepted convention of theatre, similar to the way the audience of a musical suspends its disbelief when the actors burst into song. The use of verse gives the scenes a sense of heightened drama, but it also served a practical purpose; in Shakespeare’s time, a company of actors might only have had a few copies of the script between them, and verse made it easier for the actors to remember their lines.

It’s important to note that not all the characters in *Romeo and Juliet* speak the same way. Most of the characters are members of the nobility and speak in verse, highlighting the formal speech of the upper classes. Romeo speaks in verse most of the time, but when he’s with his friends Mercutio and Benvolio, he drops the verse and begins talking in prose. Other characters, like the servants, don’t speak in verse at all. Their dialogue might give us a sense of how ordinary people actually spoke in Shakespeare’s time.

**DID SHAKESPEARE’S AUDIENCE UNDERSTAND IT?**
Yes. Some words Shakespeare uses frequently – ’anon’, ‘fain’, ‘knave’, ‘prate’, ‘prithee’, ‘thence’, ‘wherefore’ etc – are now obsolete and unfamiliar to a modern audience. However, the Elizabethan audience would have readily understood these words as part of their everyday speech.

They would also have understood the historical and cultural references that are obscure to us today. For example, they would have known immediately that biting your thumb at someone (1.1.40) was a very rude gesture and that ‘cotquean’ (4.4.6) was an insult. They would also have been familiar with festivals like Lammastide, (1.3.15) old folk tales such as that of King Cophetua, (2.1.14) and proverbs like ‘the longer liver take all.’ (1.5.15)
The rhythms of speech were different in Shakespeare’s time. The English of the 16th century is known as early modern English. It was very similar to today’s English, but the sentence structures were often longer and more complicated. Elizabethan audiences were used to listening to long, complex speeches, particularly since many of them could not read or write, and oral communication was how they got most of their news and information.

However, it would be untrue to say that Elizabethan audiences understood every line. Shakespeare was inventive with language and notorious for making up his own words. He was also a poet, and perhaps some of his more complex imagery might have gone over the audience’s heads. However, the performances of the actors would have helped the audience to understand the gist, if not the exact meaning, of Shakespeare’s lines.

WHAT’S THE STORY WITH THEE, THOU & THY?
You’ve probably noticed that Shakespeare sometimes uses pronouns which are no longer in use: ‘thee’ and ‘thou’, which mean ‘you’, and ‘thy’ and ‘thine’, which mean ‘your(s)’. In Elizabethan times, ‘thee’ and ‘thy’ were used when speaking to friends, family or people you knew well. ‘You’ and ‘your’ were the polite forms, used when speaking to someone you didn’t know well or who was of a higher social class. However, Shakespeare isn’t very consistent and uses both forms interchangeably; for example, Benvolio uses both ‘you’ and ‘thee’ when talking to Romeo in Act 1 Scene 1.

HOW TO READ THE PLAY
Settling down to read Shakespeare, with its use of verse and archaic words, can be a shock to the system. Here’s some advice on how to read the play:

Don’t be intimidated
It’s important to remember that Shakespeare wrote for everyone, from kings and queens to the ordinary man and woman on the street. His plays were popular entertainment, and he included plenty of jokes, puns, fights and love scenes to keep his audience happy. Try to approach Romeo and Juliet as you would any story about young love and teenage rebellion, and try not to be put off by the occasionally tricky language.

Take your time
Reading Shakespeare takes practice. Read slowly and don’t expect to understand everything that’s being said immediately. As you read the text, consult the annotations in the margins for explanations of difficult words and phrases.

Read it aloud
Try reading the text aloud. Even though large sections of the play are written in verse, remember that there isn’t necessarily a pause at the end of each line. Pauses are usually indicated by punctuation – commas, full stops, dashes and semi-colons. Pay attention to these pauses, and you should be able to find the correct rhythm of the text.

Watch performances
Shakespeare could never have imagined that his work would be studied in classrooms hundreds of years after his death. He might even have been horrified at the notion! He wrote plays like Romeo and Juliet to be watched, not read. Watching performances of Shakespeare plays can hugely enhance your understanding and enjoyment of them. A great director can bring the story and setting to life, and a great actor can deliver the lines in a way that makes the meaning clear.

SHAKESPEARE SPEAK
Shakespeare coined many words and phrases that are still in use today:

- advertising
- assassination
- bubble
- critic
- dwindle
- eyesore
- obscene
- outbreak
- radiance
- reclusive
- stealthy
- submerge
- suspicious
- unreal
- as luck would have it
- break the ice
- dead as a doornail
- elbow room
- full circle
- good riddance
- in stitches
- into thin air
- laughing stock
- one fell swoop
- a sorry sight
- too much of a good thing
- what’s done is done
Look Back at Act 1 Scene 1

FIRST ENCOUNTER

LINES 1–55
1. Who are Sampson and Gregory? Where are they? What are they doing?
2. What does Gregory say regarding ‘the quarrel’?
3. Who is Abraham? What does Sampson do to provoke him?

LINES 56–101
4. Who prevents Montague and Capulet from joining the brawl?
5. Whose arrival puts an end to the brawl? List the phrases he uses to describe the brawlers.
6. What punishment will be given to anyone who starts a street fight in the future?

LINES 102–157
7. How are Montague and Lady Montague related to A: Benvolio and B: Romeo? How are Benvolio and Romeo related?
8. Why is Lady Montague relieved?
9. When and where does Benvolio say he saw Romeo? What was Benvolio doing at the time?
10. How has Romeo been acting lately, according to Montague?
11. Has Montague made any attempt to find out what’s wrong with Romeo? Did he succeed?
12. What does Benvolio offer to do?

LINES 158–236
13. Why does time seem to drag for Romeo?
14. How does Romeo react to news of the ‘fray’? Is he excited, annoyed, sad, weary?
15. How does Romeo respond when Benvolio asks the name of the woman he loves? Do you think he wants to tell Benvolio about his troubles or would he prefer to be left alone?

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Sampson and Gregory are two important characters in this scene, yet they don’t appear in the play again. Why do you think Shakespeare chooses to begin the play with these two characters? What is he telling us about the Capulets and Montagues, about the world of the play?
2. ‘Clubs, bills, and partisans! Strike, beat them down,/ Down with the Capulets, down with the Montagues!’ (60-1) Imagine you are a citizen of Verona. Write a short diary entry describing the day of the brawl.
3. Imagine you are directing a stage production of Romeo and Juliet. How would you present the Montagues and Capulets in this opening scene? Do they look different from each other or similar? Think about how you would cast the two gangs, what costumes they would wear, what kind of accents they should have etc.

THINK ABOUT THEMES

LOVE
Romeo and Juliet has the reputation of being one of the greatest love stories of all time. Does it surprise you that when we first encounter Romeo, he is in love with someone else? For what reason might Shakespeare have made this storytelling decision?
Character Development

ROMEO

STATUS UPDATE
Romeo is a teenager of about sixteen or seventeen, and the only son of Montague and Lady Montague. He is not involved in the brawl in the opening scene as he is off by himself, pining over an unattainable girl.

CONSIDER THIS
- Romeo doesn't appear until line 147. What do we learn about him from Benvolio, Montague and Lady Montague before we meet Romeo himself?
- List three quotes from Romeo that indicate his distress over his love life.
- Take a Side: ‘Ay me, sad hours seem long.’ (148) Do you have sympathy for Romeo’s romantic troubles or do you feel he is being a bit dramatic?
- According to Romeo, the woman he loves will ‘not be hit/ With Cupid’s arrow.’ (195-6) What does he mean by this? Do you think he has ever approached her or is it more like a celebrity crush, with him admiring her from afar? Do you think she knows he exists?

BENVOLIO

STATUS UPDATE
Benvolio is Romeo’s cousin. In this scene, he functions like an introductory guide for the audience, as he is the only character present during all the major events: the brawl, the conversation with the Montagues, and Romeo’s introduction. Benvolio is one of the few characters who can move easily between the generations. He is trusted by the play’s grown-ups and is friends with many of the younger characters.

CONSIDER THIS
- What is Benvolio’s first action in the play? What can we say about his character based on this?
- Briefly summarise Benvolio’s romantic advice for Romeo. Does Romeo respond positively or negatively?
- What kind of relationship do you think Romeo and Benvolio have?

TYBALT

STATUS UPDATE
Tybalt is Capulet’s nephew and Juliet’s cousin. He’s a stylish swordsman and will take any excuse for a fight.

CONSIDER THIS
- Benvolio and Tybalt come across servants from both houses brawling in the street, but they both respond very differently. How do they each react?
- In what ways could Tybalt be said to be the polar opposite of Benvolio? Why do you think Shakespeare might have created these two ‘opposite’ characters?
- Do you think Tybalt is a victim or a willing participant in the Montague/Capulet feud? Give reasons for your answer.

THE PRINCE

STATUS UPDATE
The Prince of Verona is the ultimate authority figure in the play. He’s a keeper of the peace, but also judge, jury and executioner. He serves an important function in this scene by giving the audience a bit of backstory on the Montague/Capulet feud.

CONSIDER THIS
- The Prince says that the feud between the Montagues and Capulets is ‘bred of an airy word’. (76) What do you think he means by this? How long do you think the feud has been going on? Come up with three possible reasons for the feud.
- The Prince is a public figure, but how do you imagine he feels about the feud privately? Do you think he takes sides? Are there any clues in the text as to how he feels?
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